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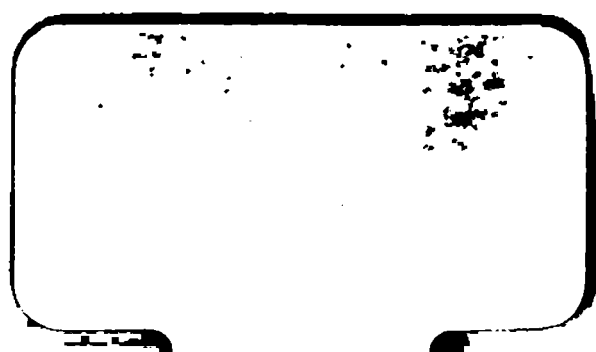
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LECTURES

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

L O N D O N :
GILBERT & RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

LECTURES
ON THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,

DELIVERED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF STOCKTON UPON TEES,
DURING LENT,

IN THE YEARS 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806.

BY
JOHN BREWSTER, M.A.
RECTOR OF EGGLESCLIFFE, IN THE COUNTY OF DURHAM.

“ These men are the servants of the Most High God, who shew unto us the way of salvation.”—*Acts* xvi. 17.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
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AND WATERLOO-PLACE, FALL-MALL.

MDCCCXXX.

L. A. P.

224

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

THE attempt to elucidate the Acts of the Apostles, on a general plan, was made at a period which threatened all revealed religion, if not with extinction, with an opposition tending to subvert the best principles of man. The observation is necessary to explain several expressions, and allusions, in the course of the narrative; and can never be without interest in the history of this country. The effect was dreadfully conspicuous in the French revolution. Its consequences invaded this island; and our pure profession of faith was bitterly assailed. The present age can hardly estimate the violence of the assault. Though we are not now what we ought to be, either in faith or obedience, the revulsion of the wave has returned upon us; and if we are true to ourselves,

and faithful to the Gospel, the example, and the feeling, will not have been given in vain.

The writer has also occasionally inserted allusions to circumstances of local interest; such, for instance, as a vicinity to the sea-coast permitted [Lect. 27]: these he trusts will be pardoned, as exciting similar feelings, under similar situations.

J. B.

May 26, 1830.

TO
MY FRIENDS, AND LATE PARISHIONERS,
THE
INHABITANTS
OF
STOCKTON UPON TEES.

THE following course of Lectures, which constituted my last ministerial labours, in a parish with which I had been long, and happily connected, I present—respectfully to the public—*affectionately* to you. When our venerable and much respected Diocesan called me to another charge, I was desirous of leaving among you *this legacy*, as a memorial of my unfeigned attachment as a pastor and a friend: and at the same time I wish to offer this testimony of my grateful remembrance of the unusual and handsome man-

ner by which you expressed your approbation of my unworthy services. In addressing you at present, I feel that confidence which springs from sentiments of mutual benevolence ; and an assurance, that what is well intended, will be favourably received.

Looking upon the awful aspect of the times, I conceived that our common Christianity required every support that piety and holiness could give it ; and as our Church had appointed a solemn season of recollection (a season I would gladly see restored to its primitive purposes) in imitation of the excellent Bishop of London¹, I commenced a series of Lent Lectures ; and, in the subsequent course, adopted the plan recommended by him ; a plan, which every one would have rejoiced to have seen executed by so pious, judicious, and assiduous a successor of the Apostles.

Accept the attempt of one, who follows, but with unequal pace ; of one, however, whose earnest wish it is to call back better times, and

¹ Bishop Porteus.

to place before you such views of the early history of our holy religion, as may induce you to *taste and see how gracious the Lord is ; and how blessed are all those that put their trust in Him !*

Believe me,

With great respect,

Your friend and servant in Christ,

JOHN BREWSTER.

GREATHAM,
August 5th, 1806.

CHRONOLOGICAL CONTENTS *.

		LECTURE I.	
			PAGE
		<i>Introduction — Reflections on Primitive Christianity — The Study of Ecclesiastical History recommended - - - -</i>	1
		LECTURE II.	
		<i>Reflections on Primitive Christianity — Proofs of the Authenticity of the History of the Acts of the Apostles - - -</i>	18
		SECTION THE FIRST.	
		LECTURE III.	
		ACTS I.	
33.	19.	<i>The Ascension of our Lord.—Return to Jerusalem, and Devotion of the Apostles — Election of Matthias—Jerusalem - -</i>	41
		LECTURE IV.	
		ACTS II. 1—41.	
		<i>The Effusion of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, and its happy consequences—Jerusalem - - - - -</i>	61

* As taken from the Index to the Holy Bible.

A.D.
Tiberius.

LECTURE V.

ACTS II. 43. III.

PAGE

*On the Lives and Manners of the first
Converts of the Gospel—Miraculous Cure
of a lame Man—Peter's Address on that
occasion—Jerusalem - - - - - 79*

LECTURE VI.

ACTS IV. 1—31.

*Imprisonment and Release of Peter and
John—Assembly and Prayer of the Be-
lievers—Strengthened by the Holy Ghost
—Jerusalem - - - - - 97*

LECTURE VII.

ACTS IV. 32. V.

*Community of Goods in the Church—Fraud
and Punishment of Ananias and Sapphira
—Miracles of the Apostles—Their Im-
prisonment and Release—Jerusalem - - 115*

SECTION THE SECOND.

LECTURE VIII.

ACTS VI. VII.

*Appointment of the Order of Deacons—
Accusation, Defence, and Martyrdom of
Stephen—Jerusalem - - - - - 136*

			LECTURE IX.	
			ACTS VIII.	
A.D.	Tiberias.			PAGE
34.	20.		<i>Persecution and Dispersion of Believers—Philip the Deacon plants a Church in Samaria—Simon the Magician—Philip teaches, and baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch—Jerusalem—Sebaste, a city of Samaria—Road from Jerusalem to Gaza—Azotus—Cæsarea</i>	155
			LECTURE X.	
			ACTS IX. 1—31.	
35.	21.		<i>The Conversion of St. Paul—Continues to preach the Gospel at Damascus—Travels</i>	
36.	22.		<i>into Arabia, and returns to Damascus—Escapes from thence, and goes to Jerusalem, &c. — Damascus — Arabia — Damascus—Jerusalem—Cæsarea—Tarsus</i>	175
37.	Caligula. 1.			
			LECTURE XI.	
			ACTS IX. 32, &c. x.	
38.	2.		<i>St. Peter's Miracles—St. Peter's Vision—</i>	
41.	1.		<i>Conversion of Cornelius—Lydda—Joppa—Cæsarea</i>	195

			LECTURE XII.	
			ACTS XI. XII. 1—23.	
A.D.	Claudius.			PAGE
42.	2.	<i>St. Peter's Defence of his Conduct at Jerusalem—Barnabas and Paul preach the</i>		
44.	4.	<i>Gospel one whole Year at Antioch, in Syria—Martyrdom of James, the brother of John—Imprisonment and Deliverance of Peter—Death of Herod Agrippa—Jerusalem — Antioch — Jerusalem — Cæsarea - - - - -</i>		215
			LECTURE XIII.	
			ACTS XII. 24. XIII. 1—41.	
45.	5.	<i>Special Ordination of Barnabas and Saul —Paul's First Apostolic Journey with Barnabas, to convert the Gentiles—Antioch Seleucia — Cyprus — Salamis and Paphos — Pamphilia — Perga — Antioch, in Pisidia - - - - -</i>		235
			LECTURE XIV.	
			ACTS XIII. 42. XIV.	
46.	6.	<i>Paul's First Apostolic Journey concluded—Antioch in Pisidia—Iconium—Lystra and Derbe, in Lycaonia—Return by Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Perga, through Attalia, to Antioch in Syria - - - - -</i>		253

Claudius.

SECTION THE THIRD.

LECTURE XV.

ACTS xv. 1—35.

A.D.			PAGE
51.	11.	<i>Paul and Barnabas remain a long Time at</i>	
52.	12.	<i>Antioch—Attend a general Council of the</i>	
		<i>Apostles and Brethren at Jerusalem con-</i>	
		<i>cerning Circumcision—Antioch—Jerusa-</i>	
		<i>lem—Antioch - - - - -</i>	271

LECTURE XVI.

ACTS xv. 36. xvi.

53.	13.	<i>Paul's Second Apostolic Journey—Dissen-</i>	
		<i>sion and Separation of Paul and Barna-</i>	
		<i>bas—Travels of Paul and Silas from An-</i>	
		<i>tioch in Syria, through the Countries of</i>	
		<i>Syria and Cilicia, the Cities of Derbe,</i>	
		<i>Lystra, and Iconium, the Regions of</i>	
		<i>Phrygia and Galatia, the City of Troas,</i>	
		<i>the Island of Samothracia, and the Cities</i>	
		<i>of Neapolis and Philippi, in Macedonia -</i>	292

LECTURE XVII.

ACTS xvii.

54.	14.	<i>Paul's Second Apostolic Journey continued.</i>	
		<i>— Amphipolis — Apollonia — Thessalo-</i>	
		<i>nica—Berea—Athens - - - - -</i>	312

Claudius.

LECTURE XVIII.

ACTS XVIII.

A.D.

PAGE

55.

15.

Paul's Second Apostolic Journey concluded—
 Corinth—Cenchrea—Ephesus—Cæsarea
 —Jerusalem—Antioch - - - - 331

56.

2.

LECTURE XIX.

ACTS XIX. 1—20.

58.

4.

Paul's Third Apostolic Journey begun—Ga-
 latia—Phrygia—Ephesus - - - - 350

LECTURE XX.

ACTS XIX. 21. XX. 1—6.

59.

5.

Paul's Third Apostolic Journey continued—
 Ephesus—Macedonia—Greece—Troas - 370

LECTURE XXI.

ACTS XX. 7. XXI. 1—15.

60.

6.

Paul's Third Apostolic Journey concluded—
 Troas—Assos—Mitylene—Chios—Sa-
 mos—Trogylum—Miletus—Coos—
 Rhodes—Patara—Tyre—Ptolemais—Cæ-
 sarea—Jerusalem - - - - 390

A.D. Nero.

SECTION THE FOURTH.

LECTURE XXII.

ACTS XXI. 16. XXII. 1—29.

			PAGE
60.	6.	<i>Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem—Apprehension in the Temple—Defence from the Stairs of the Castle—Jerusalem</i>	411

LECTURE XXIII.

ACTS XXII. 30. XXIII.

		<i>Paul brought before the Council—Vision—Conspiracy against him—Removal from Jerusalem to Cæsarea</i>	431
--	--	--	-----

LECTURE XXIV.

ACTS XXIV.

62.	8.	<i>Paul accused before Felix—Character of Felix and Drusilla—Paul's Defence, Discourse—Detention in Prison—Arrival of Festus—Cæsarea</i>	450
-----	----	--	-----

LECTURE XXV.

ACTS XXV. XXVI.

		<i>Paul's Defence before Festus, and Appeal to Cæsar—Characters of Agrippa and Bernice—Defence before Agrippa—Cæsarea</i>	471
--	--	---	-----

			LECTURE XXVI.
			ACTS XXVII.
			PAGE
62.			<i>Paul's Voyage towards Rome, and Shipwreck</i> —Cæsarea—Sidon—Myra—Fair Havens —Melita - - - - - 492
			LECTURE XXVII.
			ACTS XXVIII. 1—15.
			<i>Transactions on the Island of Melita—Voy-</i> <i>age and Journey to Rome—Melita—Sicily</i> —Syracuse—Rhegium—Appii Forum— Three Taverns—Rome - - - - - 515
			LECTURE XXVIII.
			ACTS XXVIII. 16—31.
63.	9.		<i>Paul's Entrance into and Transactions at</i>
65.	11.		<i>Rome—Conclusion - - - - - 534</i>

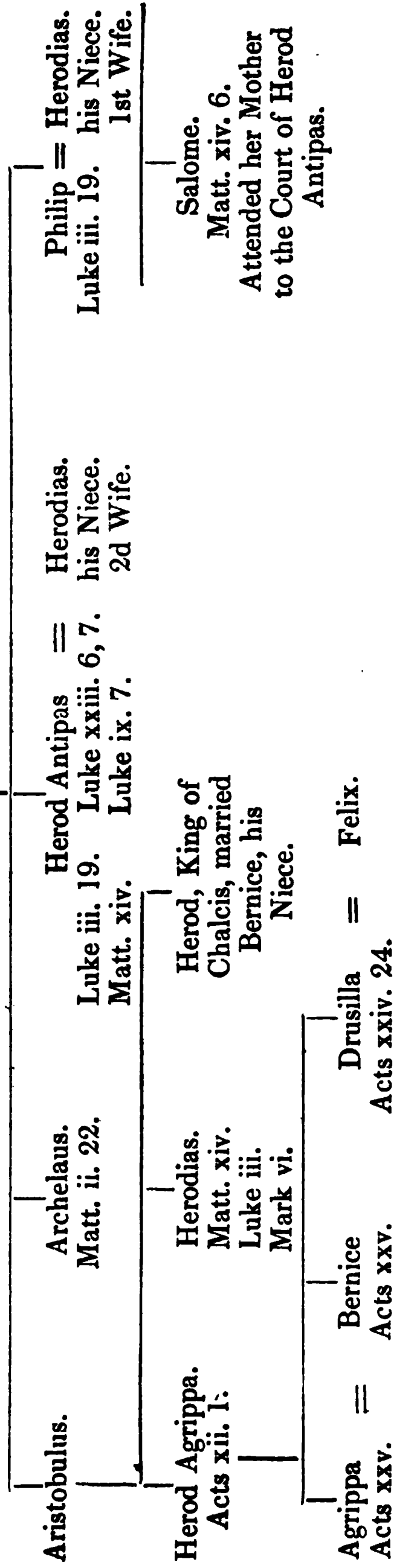
**CIVIL GOVERNMENT OF JUDÆA, &c.
DURING THE SAME PERIOD.**

A. D.	Tiberius.	
33.	19.	Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judæa and Samaria.
35.	21.	P. Pilate deprived of his government.
	Caligula.	Marcellus, Governor.
		Pilate kills himself.
38.	1.	Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, banished. Succeeded by Herod Agrippa, his nephew, grandson of Herod the Great.
41.	1.	Herod Agrippa confirmed in his government by Claudius, who added Judæa and Samaria to his kingdom. Called Herod the King. Acts xii.
44.	4.	Herod Agrippa dies miserably, Acts xii. 23. Cuspius Fadus, Governor.
46.	6.	Tiberius Alexander, Governor.
47.	7.	V. Cumanus, Governor.
48.	8.	The Jews banished Rome by the edict of Claudius.
51.	11.	Felix, Governor.
53.	13.	[Agrippa, the younger son of Herod Agrippa, ob- tains the dominion formerly belonging to Phi- lip, and other countries lying north-eastward of Galilee and Jordan. To which was added some part of Galilee. He is mentioned, Acts xxv.]
60.	6.	Festus, Governor.
61.	7.	Albinus, Governor of Judæa and Samaria.

GENEALOGY OF THE FAMILY OF HEROD, MENTIONED IN THE ACTS, &c.

HEROD THE GREAT.

Matt. ii. 3.



LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTION.

Reflections on primitive Christianity. The Study of Ecclesiastical History recommended.

THE consolation which our Saviour's promise affords to the members of his mystical body, the Church, that "he will be with them always, even unto the end of the world¹," ought to induce Christians, of every age and nation, to rouse from the languor of an unproductive faith, a faith which can hardly be said to have any foundation in the Gospel, and to "contend earnestly for that which was once delivered to the saints²." If they have any hope, any confidence in that holy name by which they are called, they should endeavour, by the exertion of their natural powers, aided and assisted by that divine Spirit of grace, which in all such cases, they are assured, will *never fail them nor forsake them*, not to lose the benefit of so gracious a declaration. The aspect of the times points out the enemy which they should particularly resist: they should guard with unremitting diligence against

¹ Matt. xxviii. 20.

² Jude 3.

those relaxed and innovating doctrines which every where present themselves to their view; they should reject with indignation those insinuating temptations, which the great deceiver of mankind, under the specious, but false appearance of civil and religious liberty, takes every opportunity of casting in their way.

Of all mankind a true disciple of Christ is the best able to maintain this conflict. The weapons of his warfare are of a spiritual nature; “the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword¹ ;” and he enjoys an assistance which is promised in no other conflict. This expression is strongly illustrated by St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesian converts, where he animates the Christian soldier to resist his spiritual enemies, by putting on “the whole armour of God² ;” covering himself, as it were, in the *complete steel* of the gospel of Christ. An unsheltered or unguarded part might be fatal to his safety. The sword, the shield, the breast-plate, the helmet—all are necessary. Great courage as well as strong arms are also required. And when all this is done, to assure himself of victory, he must go one step farther; he must “pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watch thereunto *with all perseverance*.”

If there be any one circumstance, any one *charm*, (if I may use the expression) to render the breast of the Christian invulnerable, it must be this; for “the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.” The

¹ Heb. iv. 12.

² Eph. vi. 13.

word of God operates on the heart in the most powerful manner; it changes its very nature; and while it repels its enemies, lurking, though they may be, within its inmost folds, it prepares it for a participation of that bliss which can only be found in purity, in the bosom of its Maker. "Let your feet be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;" let this be the soft and easy path on which you tread; seek no other passage to the realms of everlasting light; this is the only *highway for the redeemed to pass along*; "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace ¹."

If *the proper study of mankind be man*, it will be no improper application of this principle, to recommend to the consideration of the serious student the history of *man's nature*, not only as he finds it in common life, and in the records of his own bosom, but as it is plainly and accurately described in the unerring book of revelation. An inquiry of this kind will disclose to him an important *secret*; it will shew him how different his character and conduct are from what they ought to be; how *wretched* and *deplorable* he is by nature, how amiable and excellent he may become by grace.

History is universally acknowledged to be the most eminent of all the sciences. She has been denominated the *mistress of life*², as directing us to proper objects of reflection, placing before our eyes instances of imitation, and warning us by ex-

¹ Prov. iii. 17.

² Historia est testis temporum, lux veritatis, vitæ memoria, *magistra vitæ*, nuncia vetustatis. Cic. de Orat. ii. 9.

ample from the commission of vice. By the study of history we are carried back to the remotest ages, we converse with men of the clearest wisdom, and, under one view, we are made acquainted not only with all the motives of their actions, but the important effects of all their deliberations. We behold them *deprived* of that false glare which fame and flattery once cast around them. They are stript of all those decorations which magnified their virtues, and diminished or concealed their vices. They are reduced to the touch-stone of truth, and afford, if not always models for our imitation, lessons for our instruction.

Such is the effect of *authentic history*, considered as a general object of study. I would not appreciate its value less than it deserves, but I would contrast with it what I mean to be the subject of this Lecture, exemplified in the succeeding course, the superior importance of the study of Ecclesiastical History, which naturally arises from the interest we ought to take in its details; and in particular, of that earliest portion of it, not merely acknowledged as authentic, but delivered to us with the authority of divine inspiration—THE HISTORY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

If any thing can particularly interest the minds of Christians beyond a consideration of those doctrines which they are bound to believe as essential to their soul's health, it must be an accurate account of those *persons* whom Divine Providence selected to transmit these great truths to them, and the manner which the Spirit of God

adopted to disseminate them amongst men. "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye are digged¹."

Ecclesiastical History reveals to us that rock, the base of which rests upon the scriptures of truth.

It is much to be lamented, that for many ages there has been a neglect of studies of this nature. The early history of the Christian Church has never become a popular study, even among the members of the Church itself. Men of learning and piety, in a few solitary instances, have perhaps tasted the sweets of these sources of religious knowledge, but the examples of primitive Christians, of holy martyrs and confessors for the faith, the practice of true Christianity under the persecutions of the Roman emperors, the patience of real saints under unparalleled sufferings, the humility of mind with which they submitted, and the magnanimity which they displayed under "cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments," and even death itself; have never been delivered in plain and affecting narratives to those who cannot be uninterested in such relations. Popish legends, and the recitals of pretended miracles, have been industriously circulated to increase the darkness of the deluded church of Rome: and for a long succession of time they had their effect. Indeed to this moment the inferior members of that church are held together by the

¹ Isa. li. 1.

same means. Biography, too, has been chosen, as the most easy and familiar introduction to principles of almost every kind. False and pernicious tenets have been thus rendered agreeable to the palate; whilst art, science, and philosophy, have been promoted by amusing and instructive anecdotes of the ingenious mechanic, the great statesman, the intrepid warrior, or the learned judge. "I have been afflicted, (says an ancient professor of history) when I have seriously considered with myself, how diligently, and with what exact care, the actions of Alexander, Hannibal, Scipio, Pompey, Cæsar, and other commanders; and the lives of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others of the philosophers, have been written, and fixed in an everlasting remembrance, so that there is not the least danger that they can ever be lost; but that the *acts of the apostles* and martyrs, and of the saints of our religion, and the affairs of the rising and established Church, being involved in much darkness, are almost totally unknown, though they are of so much greater advantage than the lives of the philosophers, or great generals, both to the improvement of our knowledge and practice¹."

The history of the first ages of the Church, it is true, has been transmitted to us by few historians; and those, in many instances, are debased by superstitious relations. But in perusing these histories, we should remember that incredulity may

¹ Dodwell's Edition of Wheare's Method and Order of reading Church Histories, p. 237.

often be considered as much an error of judgment, as too great a facility of belief. Here true discrimination is absolutely necessary, founded on the principles of reason and religion. The opinion which a wise man would form on such occasions, is that which we are recommended to adopt in the case of Eusebius, who gives a narrative of Church affairs for the first three centuries after Christ. "Those books (says the author I have just mentioned) which contain the history of the Church, sufficiently demonstrate that the story of the primitive Church is true, which is gathered from the genuine writings of the orthodox Fathers; for as long as Eusebius in his history follows Justin, Irenæus, &c. and such other Fathers of approved faith, he is an historian worthy of our belief and trust: but whenever he rests upon *tradition*, and appeals to *things that were reported*, but not written, then he mixes many things that are fabulous."

In the age which immediately succeeded that of the apostles, a numerous race of holy men appeared as lights in the Church of Christ, which mark the true paths, and confirm the true faith, of Christianity. It is a great consolation to the discerning reader of Ecclesiastical History, to reflect, that in every age, however disgraced by heresies and schisms, however distinguished by the mean appearance, or magnified independence of the Christian Church, there still was to be discovered a little flock of pious and devout disciples, worshipping God in the spirit, and rejoicing in the genuine principles of the gospel. If, at some periods, this

stream of living water was hid from public view, as it were, by the entangled branches of an imperious forest, by the intervening ignorance and passions of the world, or by the cumbrous pomp of an interested form of worship, it appeared again, at some distance from its source, with all its modest beauties, gliding through a peaceful, sequestered vale, and diffusing happiness and fertility on every side. “ Sharon shall be a fold for flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me ¹.” “ The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them ; and the desart shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose ².”

But notwithstanding these pleasing remembrancers of a pure and holy faith, it is to be lamented, that at various eras in the history of the Christian Church, the purity of her doctrines was often so disguised by controversy, and so debased by worldly motives and worldly practices, that the truly amiable features of the religion of our merciful and benevolent Lord could with difficulty be distinguished. Yet at every interval of time, as if Divine Providence designed to shew that the righteous were always the objects of his care, many eminent and excellent men were presented to the world as burning and shining lights in the midst of crooked and perverse generations. Even when the darkness of ignorance prevailed in the monastic ages, the cloister itself produced some distinguished

¹ Is. lxx. 10.

² Is. xxxv. 1.

teachers, in whose breasts the lamp of divine wisdom continued to shine, whose minds were protected by the Spirit of truth; and who therefore rose above the prevailing depravation of sacred knowledge, the immoral conduct of many of their brethren, and the depressing doctrines of superstition. In our own nation, let us hail the first dawning of Reformation from such melancholy and destructive abuses, in the preaching and translation of the scriptures by Wickliff, afterwards more fully completed by Cranmer, and his truly glorious, pious, and intrepid associates.

It were much to be wished that the investigation of such topics could be placed in plain and easy narratives, within the reach of every reader. How greatly would it contribute to an uniformity of opinion! How much would it tend to restore the true doctrines of the gospel, and revive a primitive purity of religion among us. And happy would it be, if the temper of the times kept pace with such a mode of instruction; if every inquirer after truth could be brought to taste the spring of divine knowledge, as it is to be found in the book of Revelation, and to follow the windings of the stream through every successive generation.

But before that of every other age, the ecclesiastical history of the first three centuries after Christ demands our most serious attention. The primitive Church ought undoubtedly to be the model, as she is the parent of all other churches; and the nearer our observation carries us to the times of the apostles, the greater purity and perfec-

tion they will naturally be expected to exhibit. It was not long indeed before the turbulent dispositions of men introduced dangerous doctrines into the sacred profession of Christianity; and it is believed, that St. John's gospel, the production of the last living witness of our Saviour's ministry, was *directly* intended to oppose the innovating tenets of those who gave false representations of the divinity of his person, and of course a false view of that religion which he came into the world to establish. "It must needs be that offences come." *Why* such offences are permitted is well known to God, and not wholly concealed from man. "Ye are in heaviness (says St. Peter) through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ¹." Whatever therefore be the origin of evil, let us pray for grace to avoid the dreadful consequences of it; for of this denunciation we cannot be ignorant — "*Woe unto him by whom the offence cometh.*"

At the conclusion of the third century, the Church enjoyed many outward advantages by the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to the Christian faith². It is not so clear that her spiritual value increased with her prosperity. Many were the distractions that soon prevailed; and I doubt not but there were those even among the poor and persecuted members of the Church, who

¹ 1 Pet. i. 6.

² A. D. 313.

looked back with regret on the poverty they had lost, and the tortures they had endured, thinking the pure principles of an afflicted church but ill exchanged for ease and indulgence, for or high sounding titles of imperial protection. This reflection does not arise from a morose rejection of power, or a visionary imagination, that a Christian should expect nothing but persecution (for our own church possesses every grateful sentiment for the kind attention and fostering care of our civil governors) but from a deeply impressed conviction of the danger of a prosperous situation, even to the profession of religion itself. “As many as I love, (said the Spirit *to the churches*) I rebuke and chasten : be zealous therefore, and repent”¹.

As the course of my argument leads me gradually *upwards*, to the earliest times of Christianity, we rest for a moment at that age which succeeded the first promulgation of the sacred writings. Here, if they were more generally known, the most pure and glorious testimonies of the true faith would be fully disclosed. In this, the system of Christianity, if I do not debase the establishment of our holy religion by calling it by that name, would be found to differ from all systems of merely human invention. By the discussion of philosophers, and the practical efforts of their scholars, the favourite tenet of each leader of a sect has, in various ages, both before and after the coming of Christ, been attempted to be brought to perfection. The spark of philosophy, first kindled by a Plato,

¹ Rev. iii. 19.

or an Aristotle, was cherished with the warmest affection, and diffused by the united wisdom of many followers. But the influence of such opinions never was, never could be, *universal*. They attached themselves only to wise men ; and those, with all their boasted superiority, never could attain the perfection of knowledge. How then could they expect to regulate the conduct, and interest the feelings of persons far inferior to themselves in wisdom, of persons destitute of all acquired knowledge, and directed solely by the plain unassisted voice of nature ?

But the faith of the gospel is a very different principle. When first revealed by Him who is the author of truth, and truth itself, it stood before men in full perfection. *The fulness of time* was come. The infinite and undescribable advantages of it were made known at once, with every degree of clearness and precision. When the anxious and affrighted gaoler said to his holy prisoners at Philippi, “Sirs ! what must I do to be saved ?” how concise, and yet how comprehensive was the answer ! “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

The *evidences* of faith indeed have continued to increase through every age of the world. The coming of Messiah was announced, in every period, by the voice of prophecy. “The testimony of Jesus in the spirit of prophecy¹ ;” and every age, from the day of his appearance to the present

¹ Acts. xvi. 31. Rev. xix. 10.

hour, has beheld the accomplishment of some prophetic declaration concerning him, which gives new evidences of the truth of our religion, and establishes our faith on a solid foundation. But to *faith itself* nothing can be added. It is a sanctifying principle which consecrates the good actions of men, and makes them of any value in the sight of God.

Different interpretations of the doctrine of faith have, it is true, been given by different professors of Christianity. I pretend not to account for the variety. But I am assured that if we examine fairly the *words* of scripture, and compare them with the *practical belief* of the early Christians, we shall find but one; and *that one*, the faith of our reformed Church, sufficiently illustrated in our Liturgy, Homilies, and Articles. The different shades of this doctrine, which have in some instances been hastily adopted, in others misconceived, have introduced a variety into Christian worship which was never intended. “There is one Lord, *one faith*, one baptism¹ ;” and for many years after the establishment of Christianity, *one Church*. A difference indeed was sometimes discovered in private opinions, and false doctrines too frequently prevailed; but the integrity, and I may add, the *individuality*, of the Church of Christ was still preserved.

During the period which I am now considering, the ecclesiastical student will find valuable subjects

¹ Eph. iv. 5.

for contemplation ; and the pious believer will have, in many cases, the most exemplary patterns presented before him for the regulation both of his faith and practice, as well in every scene of peaceful life, as in every severe trial to which he may be called. The conflicts even of pious men, which he will meet with in the page of Church History, he will pass easily over. He will condemn indeed the heresy and the schism ; he will even weep over the inveterate error ; but he will not tarnish his charity, or let go his integrity. Above all, he will behold with complacency the portrait of *Christian virtue*, which he will find abundantly displayed in those writings, most intimately connected with, and most immediately succeeding, those marked by the finger and inspiration of God.

The evangelist St. John was the last of our Saviour's apostles called to his reward. He was not required to glorify God, like the rest of his brethren, by a violent death, but by an happy and peaceful old age. He lived till after the whole canon of scripture was completed. The history of his life, therefore, which was prolonged almost to the concluding year of the first century, forms a very prominent feature in that of primitive Christianity. Some anecdotes of peculiar interest respecting him will be found in the early writers of the Church. His exhortation of love to his church at Ephesus, when he had nearly attained the conclusion of his earthly labours, will particularly arrest our attention, and shew how well he merited the title of *Beloved*. When extreme age and weak-

ness had disabled him from his usual exertions in his public ministry, his attendants carried him to his church, or to assemblies of Christians, where he constantly addressed them with this short, but comprehensive epitome of Christian duties: "Little children! love one another." This emphatic sentence, we are told, he repeated so often, that his hearers, too much resembling those Athenians who spent their time in nothing so much as in telling or hearing something *new*, informed him that they were tired of the repetition. St. John's answer was worthy of the beloved disciple—"This is what our Lord commanded, and if we can do this, we need do nothing else." As if he had said, This is the surest proof that any Christian can give of a steadfast and well grounded faith, and he who possesses this, possesses all that man can desire.

After this picture of pastoral affection and true primitive Christianity, I will not draw aside your attention to any new subject. You will not, I cordially expect, be weary of this blessed precept: "*Little children! love one another.*" Did we but seriously consider the influence which this holy principle has on our lives, and how closely it presses upon us even on the bed of death, so far from being weary of hearing the repetition of it, it ought to be the first object of our morning's care, and the last of our evening's reflection. Forgiveness of our enemies is the test of our Christianity. "God is love: and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the

day of judgment ¹.” An awful time ! for who will, who *can have boldness*, to meet an *unforgiven* enemy in the presence of Almighty God ? “ If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother,” (and we are all brethren) is he not pronounced a liar ? for “ this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also ².”

Such are the treasures to be found in the rich mine of Ecclesiastical History ; treasures, such as no other history, however valuable, can afford. For “ what is there in the history of any nation, or of all nations, of any certainty or distinctness of the origin of the world, and the most ancient times ? It reaches not so high as the history of the first men ; it hath no revelations of God, or promises concerning the Messiah ; it is plainly ignorant of the government of the Church, and of its preservation. These things, and many other of this nature, are only to be found in the sacred and Ecclesiastical History. Why do you, (exclaims a professor of this science, whose words I use, in an apostrophe to the great orator of Rome,) why do you extol history as the *discoverer of antiquity*, which with you was not very ancient, and yet was sometimes corrupt ? You cry her up as a *witness of times*, but then with you she was not very rich in that, and sometimes was not an allowable witness. It is the *sacred history* alone, which gives a faithful testimony of the succession of times, from the very beginning of all things, without one fault. She

¹ 1 John iv. 16, 17.

² 1 John iv. 20, 21.

alone is the most shining light of the eternal truth. And to conclude, she alone is the best *mistress of life*, and absolutely perfect : for tell me where else you can hope to find the unquestionable precepts of true and solid virtue, O ye hearers and readers of history ! You will certainly be deceived if you seek any other guide than the *sacred* or *Church history*. Do you desire to have sincere examples of true piety ? Search then the sacred and ecclesiastical histories, and you will find them there, and no where else ; there only are the monuments of the knowledge, of the invocation of him, of faith and repentance preserved ; there only shall you ever meet with the wonderful instances of perfect fortitude, of pure obedience, of unspotted chastity, of an easy beneficence, of ready goodness, because performed on the *motives of true Christianity*. If you meet (in profane history) with any brave and generous action, it was undertaken for the sake of glory, which is a mere shadow, or of revenging an injury, which ought to be condemned ; but the things which are represented here, are not attempted to be accomplished in the pursuit of popular fame, but for the obtaining true glory ; not out of a desire of revenge, but out of the love of Christ ; not for the defence of a perishable country or transitory riches, but for the obtaining the *heavenly Jerusalem, a kingdom not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*¹."

¹ Wheare (first Camden reader of history at Oxford) on the Order, &c. of reading Church Histories. Dodwell's Edition.

LECTURE II.

Reflections on Primitive Christianity. Proofs of the Authenticity of the History of the Acts of the Apostles.

WHEN a bust or a statue is dug up from the foundation of some ancient city, once celebrated for the cultivation and perfection of the fine arts, with what admiration do we behold its beauties ! With what zeal for such an exquisite model of taste do we praise the work of a Phidias or a Praxiteles ! What a sensation of wonder and delight is excited in our breasts, when we examine the gracefulness and proportion of the figure, the expression of the features, and the delicacy of the execution ! And shall we be less impressed with admiration, feel less rational pleasure in the discovery and contemplation of a moral portrait, selected from the almost forgotten works of Christian historians, than in the remains of a lifeless marble ?

Among many fragments, broken and defaced by the destructive hand of time, how pleasing and instructive is it to discover the venerable features of an EARLY CHRISTIAN, graceful in every line of cha-

racter, and true in every proportion of beauty ! Here is indeed displayed the touch of a *master* ! and a model of imitation is offered to men even of remote generations. We behold what Christians *were*—we sigh when we reflect what Christians *are*. But as Almighty God has promised, and has *given*, the same succours of divine grace to us, as to the immediate followers of our Saviour, though at humble distance, we can have no just apology to plead, either for the defect of godliness, or the deficiency of our zeal. And if we conquer, as we may do, *through Him who strengtheneth us*, our reward is with us. “Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed¹.”

In my last Lecture I remarked, that in the history of the apostolic age, exemplary and interesting patterns might be selected for the regulation of Christian conduct, not only of such as, like the blessed Evangelist St. John, sink into a peaceful grave, laden with years and with piety, but of such as are called to bear testimony to the truth by the severest bodily inflictions. Of this latter description was Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. This good man was one of St. John’s disciples, and his life was protracted, like his master’s, to a very late period ; Divine Providence thus continuing to the Church, for almost two centuries, by an uninterrupted succession, a personal evidence, as it were, of the truth of its establishment. But Polycarp was called upon to sustain a trial from which the evan-

¹ John xx. 29.

gelist was exempt. Venerable from age, and *strong in faith*, he shrunk not from his allotted post, but stepped forward as a willing martyr. Even at the stake itself the mind of Polycarp was collected, and his prayer was pure, fervent, and evangelical. No tremor of age, no expression of fear, not the smallest inclination to avoid the trial, damped the ardour of his dying moments. “Blessed be Thou, said he, who hast made me worthy to see this day and hour; who hast made me a partaker among thy holy martyrs in the cup of thy Christ, that my soul and body may be re-united unto life eternal, being sanctified by thy Holy Spirit. Wherefore, O Lord, I adore thee for all thy mercies; I bless thee; I glorify thee through thy only begotten Son, the eternal High Priest, Christ Jesus, through whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to thee be glory now and for evermore.” And when he had cried aloud *Amen*, he committed himself to the flames.

Who does not see, in the prayer of Polycarp, the very spirit in which the liturgy of our Church was composed? and that the doctrines of the divinity of our blessed Saviour, and of the Holy Spirit, were primitive doctrines of the Church of Christ? Till certain expressions can be argued out of the scriptures, and the writings of the early Fathers, we must continue our confidence in the acknowledged faith of the Church; and it is evident, that no argument can be produced against them, but such as would undermine and overthrow the testimony of all history.

When we behold such illustrious instances of calm resignation, and patient suffering, as I have briefly recited in the cases of St. John and Polycarp, arising from the heavenly doctrine and last legacy of Christ, can we wonder that the early ages of Christianity were distinguished far above succeeding times, in purity both of faith and conduct? It was then that the professors of a blessed religion bore a stronger resemblance than in name, to their divine Master. It was then that the seeds of heresy were *thinly* sown, and the tares had not choaked up the wheat. It was then that unbelievers looked with admiration on this select society, and exclaimed, *See! how these Christians love one another!*

The character of primitive Christianity receives an ample illustration by a comparison of the writings of the Fathers with the incidental testimonies of heathen authors. This will be found accurately and judiciously executed in the work of a modern writer¹. But as the Acts of the Apostles contain the first records of the Christian Church, I cannot wholly omit the argument in their favour, by shortly elucidating the opinion which some ancient writers, certainly not friendly to their cause, held concerning their moral conduct.

Pliny, in his celebrated letter to Trajan, gives this account of the followers of Christ:—"that having examined them, setting aside their superstition, he could find no fault with them; and that

¹ Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity, 2 Vols.

this was their principal error, that they were wont to assemble on a certain day; that they sung hymns to Christ as to God; that they bound themselves by an oath [or sacrament] not to commit any crime, but to abstain from theft and adultery, to adhere strictly to their promises, and not to deny money deposited in their hands ¹." Pliny's own panegyric on his favourite Emperor is not more flattering than this account of the early Christians. The reference is strong to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. If we turn to the history of the Acts of the Apostles, the same conduct is almost literally described. "And they, continuing daily with one accord, and breaking bread from house to house, (alluding to the sacramental supper) did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people ²."

Julian, the celebrated Apostate and Emperor, recommends, among other means for the advancement of Paganism, the building of hospitals, and great liberality to the poor, not only of their own persuasion, but of others. The argument he uses is this: "When the impious Galileans relieve both their own poor and ours, it is shameful that ours should be destitute of our assistance. Let us not

¹ Plin. Ep. l. 10. Ep. 97.

² "Comparing Pliny's letter with the account in the Acts, it seems to me (says Bonnett) that I had not taken up another author, but that I was still reading the historian of that extraordinary society." This is strong, (adds Dr. Paley) but there is undoubtedly an affinity, and all the affinity that could be expected. Evidences, Vol. I. p. 116.

suffer others to emulate our good actions. Why should we not attend to the means by which this impiety has increased, namely, humanity to strangers, care in burying the dead, and pretended sanctity of life¹?" "Nothing but the force of truth (says an eminent divine) could have extorted so full an acknowledgement of the great humanity and charity of the Christians from so bitter an enemy of our religion as Julian was²." This peculiar attention to the necessities of the poor was one of the first proofs which the primitive converts gave of their Christianity. "Observing (says Julian again) that our priests neglect the poor, the impious Galileans (such is the language in which he describes the benevolent followers of Jesus) have adopted this philanthropy—of love towards the gods, by instructing the family in religious duties, and towards men, by distributing from a little liberally to the necessitous, by giving with a willing mind, and endeavouring to do as much good as possible. In the same manner they, beginning with what they call a love-feast, and an hospital (a place of reception for age and want) and the ministry of tables (common tables, or provision, furnished for the poor by the rich) for as the work, so is the word, frequent among them, pervert the faithful to impiety³." At a very early

¹ Julian's Ep. 49. To Arsacius, priest of Galatia. Duncombe's Translation.

² Tillotson, S. 119.

³ Julian's Duties of a Priest.

period in the history of the Christian Church, these public banquets for the poor are mentioned, and a particular order of men appointed, whose office it was to attend to this *daily ministration*. "It is not reason (said the Apostles) that we should leave the word of God, and *serve tables*. Look out, therefore, seven men of honest report whom we may appoint over this business."

The apologies of the ancient Fathers bear a strong testimony of the purity of primitive Christianity. Though it will readily be conceded that they were partial judges in their own cause, it will surely be admitted that they durst not have addressed such language to the Emperor and Senate of Rome, if it could not have stood the test of truth. "It is objected, says one of them, that some Christians have been convicted of offences, but I must tell you, that you condemned them not as criminals, but as Christians. We particularly desire, that all those who are arraigned as Christians may be examined as to their actions¹." Another challenges the "guardians of the Roman empire, presiding in the very eye of the city for the administration of public justice," to point out, among the variety of criminals brought before their tribunals, "any one *Christian* who was accused as a murderer, a sacrilegious person, or a robber. Those condemned to the mines or wild beasts for offences, are they not all of your own religion? Among these there is not *one Christian*

¹ Justin Martyr, Ap. c. 7.

condemned or executed for any crime, but that of his name alone ¹." The same writer remarks the superiority of the Christian to the Heathen under the same sentence of condemnation. "The guilty Heathens seek refuge in darkness, and when apprehended, tremble; when accused, deny; when condemned, they sink down in sadness, and reflect upon the number of their sins in confusion of conscience. But can you see any thing like this in the deportment of *Christians*? Not one Christian blushes or repents, unless it be for not having become a Christian sooner. If a Christian goes to trial, he goes like a conqueror, with an air of triumph; if he is impeached, he glories in it; if indicted, he makes no defence at the bar; when interrogated, he ingenuously confesses; and when condemned, returns thanks to his judges. What kind of wickedness do you call this, exclaims this strenuous apologist for the Christians, which has not one feature of wickedness belonging to it? neither fear, nor shame, nor artifice, nor repentance, nor desponding sighs of criminals attending it. What a peculiar sort of evil, or *reverse of evil*, is this, that makes the guilty rejoice, and ambitious of accusation, and happy in punishment. You cannot call these the effects of madness, since you are wholly unacquainted with the powers of the Christian Religion ²." There is but one observation to be made on these testimonies, allowing them to be authentic; which no one, I imagine, doubts.

¹ Tertul. Ap. c. 44.

² Tertul. Ap. c. 1.

Had these things *not been so*, with what confidence could these writers have appealed for their truth to their adversaries themselves, persecuted as they then were by those very rulers, and hated by almost every other branch of their fellow-citizens? But if these things *were so*, what shall we say to those who closed their eyes against such eminent means of conviction? “How shall they escape—alas! *how shall we escape*—if we neglect so great salvation¹?”

I would not strain my argument so far as to infer, that among the primitive Christians there were no wicked men. Among the Apostles, themselves, there was *one* Judas. And at no period can it be asserted, that there was a time when the great enemy of man did not “go about seeking whom he might devour².” The early Christian Church did indeed, in cases of delinquency, what a small society easily might do, they put away from them the offending person; who was never again received into the community till he had expiated his offence by contrition and repentance. But the voice of history warrants us to assert, that a deep and *radical* change actually took place in the temper and conduct of those who faithfully received the heavenly doctrines of Christianity. The city of Corinth, at the time when its conversion was undertaken by St. Paul, was particularly distinguished by the depravity of its morals. But the general change effected by his preaching, through

¹ Heb. ii. 3.

² 1 Pet. v. 8.

the sanctifying means of the Gospel, affords an irrefragable argument in its favour. “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such *were* some of you: but ye are washed; but ye are sanctified; but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God¹.” The most inveterate and abominable sins were uprooted by the pure preaching of forgiveness through Christ; and their *new hearts*, implanted by the Spirit of Divine love, gave them a new principle of existence; for “if any man be in Christ he is a *new creature*².”

A meditation on the primitive character of Christians, in the first ages of the Church, may be esteemed the most appropriate introduction to the HISTORY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: the authenticity of which now offers itself to our consideration.

It is not my intention to present before you, in the following Lectures, a critical dissertation on this important history. This has been already done by many learned and admirable commentators. But if the feelings of this audience may be interested, if their hearts may be softened towards the evangelic graces of the Gospel, if their conduct may be influenced by an attentive observation of the incidents which occur in the earliest period of

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 9.

² 2 Cor. v. 17.

our Church History, by bringing immediately before their eyes the circumstances which attended the first preaching of the Apostles, and adapting them, as we proceed, to all the holy purposes of common life, the end of these Lectures will be fully attained. And, O Thou! who art *the way, the life, and the truth*, grant that the words which I shall deliver from this place may be acceptable to God, and effectual to the salvation of myself, and my hearers, for thy sake!

The History of the Acts of the Apostles contains a narrative of the occasional occurrences of the Christian Church for thirty years; namely, from the thirty-third year, the date of our Saviour's crucifixion, to the sixty-third year of the generally received Christian era¹. The author of it was St. Luke², the elegant, the learned, and inspired com-

¹ The Author thinks it right to adhere to the Chronology which the reader will find marked in the margin of the principal editions of the Bible. Learned men have differed in opinion upon this subject. The Chronological Index to which I refer allows a variation of *four* years. But as a clear elucidation of the history, taken *under one view*, is of great importance to all, but especially to the unlearned reader, it is thought advisable to make no alterations in this respect. The present computation of time, from the birth of Christ, did not take place till about the 527th year of the vulgar era, when it was introduced by Dionysius Exiguus, a native of Scythia, afterwards a Roman Abbot, who flourished in the reign of the Emperor Justinian. It was adopted by Bede, and thus brought into common use in the Western Churches.

² “ It is apparent, from the constant testimony of all antiquity, that St. Luke, the author of the Gospel under that name, was also the author of the book entitled *the Acts of the Apostles*,

poser of the Gospel distinguished by his name. St. Luke was the companion of St. Paul in many parts of his travels, which are recounted in this book without affectation or interested design; and it is reasonable to suppose, that he received much information from this indefatigable and venerable Apostle. The *analogy of faith*, and correspondence between the history of the Acts of the Apostles, and other parts of Scripture, as well as with the outward circumstances of the world at the time it was written, constitute authentic proofs of his veracity.

Some of these proofs I shall briefly arrange in the following order:—

1. The authenticity of the history of the Acts may be asserted from its general agreement with the Gospels and Epistles. In all the important and peculiar doctrines of Christianity, they are radically and essentially the same. Miracles and prophecies are equally appealed to in testimony of its truth. The occurrences which took place on our Saviour's death, naturally arise from the circum-

the matter never being once questioned by any of the Catholic Church. The first and most early heretics of the Church, it is said, did not receive it as Scripture. But I have carefully examined the several places where these heretics are said to have rejected the Acts, but find not any one reason assigned for their doing so. To end in Father Simon's words, (Crit. Hist. p. l. c. 14. in fine) "Let us leave these enthusiasts, who had no other reason to refuse the books that were approved by the whole Church than this, that they did not suit with the idea which they had formed of the Christian Religion."—Jones on the Canonical Authenticity of the N. T.

stances related at the conclusion of the Gospels ; and the letters, which were sent by the Apostles to different Churches or individuals, agree with the manner in which the several Churches were originally established, according to the history of the Acts of the Apostles. One plan, one spirit, animates the whole. The Acts indeed may in some measure be considered as a supplement to St. Luke's Gospel in particular, so far as relates to the style of the composition, and its design, but it preserves an equal connection with those of the other Evangelists. The doctrines of the Epistles correspond in every particular with those detailed in the Acts. And not the doctrines only, but undesigned coincidences of facts, related in the narrative of St. Luke, and referred to by the Apostle Paul in his written communications with distant Churches, or absent friends, demonstrate that neither the facts alleged, nor the letters which allude to them, were adduced as parts of a premeditated plan, or intended in any respect for the purpose of deception. " The simple perusal of the writings (says an author who has cast the clearest light upon this subject) is sufficient to prove, that neither the history was taken from the letters, nor the letters from the history. Coincidences, therefore, which are too close and numerous to be accounted for by accidental occurrences of fiction, must necessarily have truth for their foundation ¹."

¹ Paley's View, &c. vol. ii. p. 195. The reader is particularly referred to that author's *Horæ Paulinæ*, as affording a valuable collection of evidences on this subject.

An additional testimony of the connection between St. Paul and St. Luke will be found in the *salutations* sent by the former from Rome during his first imprisonment at that place, as we find it mentioned at the conclusion of the history of the Acts. In the Epistle to the Colossians, which was written at this period, he says, “ Luke, the beloved physician, greeteth you ¹ ;” and in that to Philemon, nearly of the same date, he calls Luke his *fellow-labourer* ² .”

2. The second proof arises from a comparison of this book with the relation which is given of its contents by the early Fathers of the Church, as well as from their confirmation of its divine authority. Without entering at large into this evidence, and selecting passages from each, it will be sufficient to adduce one, as comprehending the whole. Eusebius, speaking the sense of all the writers who had gone before him during the first three centuries, observes, that “ Luke was a native of Antioch, and a physician by profession; that he was a companion of St. Paul, though he had frequent communications with the rest of the Apostles; that he has left, in *two divinely inspired books*, lessons which are medicinal for our souls, which he learnt from the Apostles; that is, the Gospel, which he declares to have written, as those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word delivered it to him, all of whom he professes to have followed from the beginning; and the

¹ Col. iv. 14.

² Ver. 24.

Acts of the Apostles, which he composed, not as he received them by information from others, but as an eye-witness himself¹." And in another passage he says, "The book of the Acts of the Apostles was, from the beginning, unanimously received by all the Churches as part of the New Testament, or sacred code of divinely inspired books^{2 3}."

3. A comparison of this book with the writings of the ancient classical historians, so far as it is connected with the period of which it treats, offers to our consideration a third convincing proof of its authenticity. Had the Acts of the Apostles stood singly, as it were, in the page of history, had it related a course of events unconnected with what was known to be the moral, political, or even geographical situation of that quarter of the globe where the scene of its actions was laid, some reasonable hesitation might have been entertained of the veracity of its author. But supported as it is, by select passages from the writings of men, who, least of all, wished to strengthen the belief of this *dangerous superstition*⁴, as they termed Christianity, the very slanders of these authors become important proofs of the truth of that religion they would profane.

¹ Eus. Hist. lib. iii. c. 4.

² Ibid.

³ These extracts may be sufficient at present. The whole series of attestations on the authenticity of the Scriptures will be met with in Paley's Evidences, vol. i. c. 9.: and those more appropriate to the Acts of the Apostles, in Biscoe's Serm. at Boyle's Lectures, and in Benson's History of the first planting of the Christian Religion.

⁴ Suet. Nero, c. 12. Plin. Ep.

Beyond every other writer, whose evidence thus strongly authenticates the Holy Scriptures, and particularly the Acts of the Apostles, none is of greater; or indeed *so great*, importance as the Jewish historian Josephus. He appears to have been raised up by Divine Providence for this very purpose. If any man might be expected to oppose every argument in favour of Christianity, Josephus would be that man. Yet almost every part of his history confirms its truth. The political state of Judea, its civil officers, its High-Priests, its Scribes, and Pharisees, are all accurately delineated, and are clearly in description the *officers, High-Priests, Scribes* and *Pharisees* of the Acts of the Apostles. The different branches of the family of Herod, some of the domestic transactions of that family, and in particular the dreadful end of Herod Agrippa, which will be noted in its place, are all recorded in both histories. St. Luke's narrative being first written, could not be taken from Josephus; and nothing is so improbable, nay, from the circumstances of the men and of the times, nothing appears to be more *impossible*, than that the Jewish historian should derive any part of his materials from any Christian writer.

When a history is forged, there is reason to expect that the author, by an accidental slip of memory, should introduce the customs and manners, and perhaps the incidents, of some other period. But compare St. Luke's narrative with that of any historian of those times, either Heathen or Jew, and it will be found consistent in every part. The

Roman historians are thus called in as witnesses of the truth of Christianity ; and Josephus himself, were he present, and willing to authenticate his own writings, would be compelled to bear a reluctant testimony.

4. A fourth argument in favour of the authenticity of the Acts of the Apostles, may be drawn from the nature of the case itself ; for, without this book there would be an important chasm, impossible to be filled up, in the history of Christianity. The Apostles were promised by our Saviour a divine assistance after his departure. “ These things have I spoken unto you being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you¹. ” Had not the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost been recorded in this book, one of the most material events in the history of the religion of Jesus must have remained involved in impenetrable darkness. The followers of our Lord, who had been instructed in the history of the Gospels only, must have continued to expect a blessing, of which they could not have heard ; and they who believed at all, must have believed in an imperfect Christianity. Besides, without the book of the Acts, the true origin of Church-government, its several orders and offices, the establishment of the first Churches, the

¹ John xiv. 26.

first preaching of men immediately sent forth by Christ himself, endowed with supernatural powers, and offering terms of salvation to Jew and Gentile, to bondmen and free men, would have been, if not wholly concealed from, very imperfectly known to, all succeeding generations.

Corrupted as the world is, it would hardly have been remembered that there had ever existed a pure and unadulterated Church of Christ; that the faith of Christians, being founded on a rock of adamant, was productive of the most exemplary works; and that all which could have been expected from a religion purposely instituted for the eternal redemption of a world of sinners, had been happily realized in the lives of the first converts, and in the sufferings and deaths of the primitive confessors and martyrs.

It will considerably illustrate the view of Christianity, which is given in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, if we consider, in the last place, the state of society, both in a civil and moral capacity, in those countries where it first appeared, or which were soon after visited by the first preachers of the Gospel. A large portion of the then known world was subject to the Roman empire. Though a trace of original liberty might be discovered in the *Senate* of Rome, it was a slender trace indeed; for the real power of the state existed in the hand of a despotic master. The great monarchies of former days, the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Grecian, had sunk before her; and the different fragments of these large empires were now become

Roman provinces, and were ruled either by “ Roman governors invested with temporary commissions, or by their own princes and laws, in subordination to the republic, whose sovereignty was to be acknowledged, and from which the conquered kings, that were continued in their dominions, derived their borrowed majesty¹.” Amongst these, we shall find Felix and Festus at Cæsarea, Sergius Paulus at Cyprus, and Gallio in Achaia; amongst the others, different branches of the family of Herod the Great. By this extraordinary arrangement of the nations of the earth, Divine Providence was preparing for an introduction of a new order of things, and a more easy diffusion of the extensive blessings of Christianity. To break down the barriers of hostile nations, and to promote a similitude of manners and opinions, by uniting all, as it were, under one head, was to clear the way for the profession of that universal religion which was designed, in due course of time, to supersede the predominant idolatry, and remove all the base arts of superstition.

If the civil government of the Roman empire was thus calculated to effect such important purposes, its moral state seemed clearly to require it. How shall the *pure* eye be directed to examine the Roman history at this period? How shall we desire the immaculate breast to be impressed with all the dreadful variety of crimes which distinguish the age of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero;

¹ Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. ch. i. § 1.

contemporaries with those holy men whose actions are recorded, and presented to us as amiable models, both of faith and virtues, in the innocent and interesting narrative of St. Luke? We shrink at the comparison; and readily allow that we find no recompence in the elegant language of the Roman historians, nor in the acute observations which some of them have made on the unworthy subjects of their pens, for the disclosure of such atrocious acts of wickedness, such disgusting delineations of vice.

But let it be remembered, and remembered with exultations of gratitude and joy, that, at *such* a period, it pleased “God to send his Son into the world, that he might destroy the works of the devil¹.” When *darkness had covered the earth*, and worse than darkness the people, then was the moment for the *true light* to shine.

It may further be remarked, though the observation may be thought to imply a paradox, that even the debasing characters of the Emperors were not only no impediments to the diffusion of Christian principles, but, in some measure, were the negative causes of its success. This I shall explain in the words of a judicious critic. “Christianity at first was more likely to prosper under bad, than under good Emperors, if these were tenacious of their religious rites and ceremonies. The bad Emperors had usually other crimes and other mischiefs in view, and no leisure to plague such a little sect when compared to Paganism. And accordingly,

¹ 1 John iii. 8.

from the death of Christ to Vespasian, for above the space of thirty-seven years, the Romans did not mind the progress of the Gospel. They were ruled by weak, or frantic, and vicious Emperors; the magistrates and senators, and every worthy man of any note, stood in continual fear for their own lives. Under Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, the empire was a scene of confusion, desolation, and misery. Nero indeed destroyed several Christians at Rome, but it was for a supposed crime of which all the world knew them to be innocent; so that this cruel treatment raised compassion, and rather did service than harm to the Christian cause, and the persecution was soon over¹." The persecution was sufficient to stimulate the Christian, without destroying Christianity. So wonderful are the ways of Providence, and to be discovered only by the event!

During the whole of this period, the characters of *true Christians* were in complete contrast to those of the most polished subjects of the Roman government, and the infant Church of Christ (allowing for such deviations as arose from the corruption of human nature) might then justly be styled "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle²."

The prospect of this flourishing state of Christian principles at the introduction of Ecclesiastical History, is to us most comfortable and salutary. It shews us what an height of virtue, what an

¹ Jortin's Rem. on Eccl. Hist. Vol. I. p. 7.

² Ephes. v. 27.

eminent degree of piety and perfection may be attained by the grace of God. And long as the day is past since the bright beams of the sun have reflected themselves on a world distinguished by a pure profession of religion, let us not think that a renovation of those blessed times is wholly without hope. *Christ is with us still.* What he has done for his Church, we are assured, by his promise, he is still ready to perform. As he has always been faithful to his word, we have every just reason to imagine that he will continue to befriend us. But whatever reflections we may too frequently have occasion to make on the general habits and manners of *professing* Christians, not one among us should neglect the study of his *own* heart. Collectively, and individually, we must still remain faithful to him—faithful to those heavenly doctrines which he came from heaven to offer to the world—faithful as sons and servants, accepting his atonement with thankfulness, and dedicating *ourselves, our souls and bodies*, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto him. “My son! said the Wise Man, give *me* thine heart¹.” It is our *heart*, in the strictest and completest sense of the word, which we must offer, and present, before the throne of grace; not an heart full of the world, full of vanity, sin, and folly; but an heart emptied of every vain-glorious thought, humbled to the dust with a sense of its unworthiness, and trusting only to the merits of

¹ Prov. xxiii. 26.

our ever-blessed Redeemer. It is from this point only that we dare look to the luminous examples of the primitive Christians; as it is from this point only, through the assistance of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, that we can have any just confidence of success.

SECTION I.

LECTURE III.

ACTS I.

The Ascension—Return to Jerusalem, and Devotion of the Apostles—Election of Matthias. Jerusalem, A.D. 33.

THE entrance on a new field of instruction is like the approach to a new discovered country; or at least to a country, of whose existence, perhaps, we might not have been ignorant, but of which we have neither admired the beauties, nor tasted the delicious fruits. The Acts of the Apostles, though long a favourite and a fruitful study in the Christian Church, may yet be new to some who have never considered its history in detail, have never attended the primitive Christians to their retired places of worship, have never observed the effect of the first preaching of the Apostles, nor accompanied them in their progresses to disseminate the word of salvation.

If gratitude may yet be found within the human heart, if affection yet remain for those who have

been the means of conferring everlasting benefits on mankind, if a pious zeal for the propagation of those doctrines which speak *peace to those who are near, and to those who are far off*, have yet any influence on a world, devoted, alas! too frequently to other purposes, with what rapture shall we not look back upon the labours of our first instructors; how shall we not bless God for the honest warmth of Peter, the eloquence and energy of Paul, the piety, wisdom, and discretion of the other holy founders of the Christian Church!

Of all species of writing, that of biography has been esteemed the most interesting and instructive; as “it is most easily applied to the purposes of life.” General history makes less impression on the mind than those events which are connected with personal occurrences. We remember with less ardour and improvement the result of many actions, than we do the particular changes which took place in the accomplishment of them; we rest with peculiar interest on the difficulties which occur; we weep with those that weep over circumstances of distress; we rejoice with those that *do* rejoice for the happy termination of affliction.

The history of the Acts of the Apostles, into which we are now entering, abounds in biographical anecdote. Many characters in it are developed by their actions, and the interest which we take in such discoveries, enriched as they are by the invaluable properties of gospel-knowledge, meliorate the affections, improve the understanding, regulate and reform the heart.

The introduction to this book carries back our attention to the Gospel written by the same author¹, in which he had given us an account of the life, doctrine, and religion of Jesus, “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he, through the Holy Ghost, (when he breathed on his disciples, and said, “*Receive ye the Holy Ghost*”) had given commandments unto the Apostles whom he had chosen.” In the present treatise, the divine plan is still further pursued, by a revelation of the means by which this religion, which was at first so wonderfully declared, was afterwards as wonderfully propagated in the space of thirty years: not only in Jerusalem, and within the narrow limits of Judea, but through many neighbouring nations, even as far distant as Rome, then justly esteemed the metropolis of the world. A propagation the more wonderful, as it was not assisted by Kings and Emperors, nor even promoted by rulers of powerful districts and provinces, but by plain and obscure men—by men, however, lifted from their humble sphere by the appointment of our Lord himself, and commissioned, as evidences of the sacred truth which they proclaimed, with miracles, and wonders, and signs.

¹ “The *former treatise* have I made, O Theophilus.” Dr. Benson conjectures that St. Luke wrote both his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles in *one book*, and divided it into two parts; and that the Acts are the second part of the *book*, or *history*, of which he himself has called his Gospel the first part, *τον πρωτον λογον*. The *latter* is inscribed to Theophilus, as well as the *former*.

To make the connection between this treatise and his Gospel more apparent, St. Luke recapitulates the subject of his last chapter, which had ended with a concise narrative of the ascension of our Lord at Bethany.

It appears that, from the time of our Saviour's resurrection to that of his ascension, forty days had elapsed; forty days of extreme interest to that Church which he came to establish. In this important interval he had frequent conferences with his disciples, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Few of these his last instructions are recorded in the Gospels, and of these few, it is not possible to fix the exact order and time. But there is reason to think, that much of the discourses we meet with in the conclusion of the books of each of the Evangelists, took place during these forty days; that is, after the Apostles were returned to Jerusalem. When our blessed Lord first arose from the tomb, his disciples were directed by the angel, in conformity to his own injunction, to go into Galilee, and that *there* they should see him. When, therefore, he commanded them to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, the direction must have been given after they were come back from Galilee, before the feast of Pentecost¹.

With what rapture and delight might the contemplative Christian entertain his soul, by reflect-

¹ Townson's Discourse on the Evangelical History, from the Interment to the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, p. 184.

ing on the probable subjects of our Lord's conferences during the forty days he thus conversed with his disciples! Happy days to those who heard him! Happy days to us who are benefited by these conferences! as there is no doubt but he revealed to his chosen servants, on these solemn occasions, every necessary instruction for the establishment and regulation of his Church, and the propagation of his heavenly doctrines. They who were so lately sad with the prospect of his calamitous end, and of his departure from them, now rejoiced for all things that had come to pass; having been assured by our Lord himself, that this was the accomplishment of the great purposes of Providence concerning him; that according to Moses and the Prophets, "Christ ought to suffer such things, and *thus* to enter into his glory¹."

Nor was the time far distant when an additional testimony of the divinity of his person was to be allowed them. The wonderful circumstance of his Ascension was at hand. Impelled by that expectation of our Saviour's temporal power, which had been more than once manifested during his abode among them, the Apostles now injudiciously enquire, "Lord! wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" To a political question which concerned them not, he replied by a becoming reproof, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons." Of the same nature is the expression, "*Of that day and hour knoweth no*

¹ Luke xxiv. 26.

*man*¹.” How strongly should it suppress in us all over-curious inquiries concerning the will and dispensation of God! While we continue in this tabernacle of the body, there is much which we do not know, much which we *ought not* to know. If the moment of the great revolutions of kingdoms and nations, if the exact point of time when some great convulsion of nature is appointed to take place, were disclosed to us, our conduct would not be regulated by general principles of security, natural or moral, but would be directed solely to that particular period and circumstance which we had long foreknown. Were the limits of our lives of this description, the consequences would be the same; how careless would every action be, till the unwished-for arrival of the appointed time! But God hath been pleased to leave that uncertain, the certainty of which would be attended with effects fatal to our everlasting peace. “All the days of our appointed time let us wait, till our change come²;” and then a day later, or a day sooner, will be the same to him, whose mind is piously and religiously disposed at *any season* to appear before his God.

In answer to this question of the disciples, our Saviour gives them more important information than they had any reason to expect. Instead of satisfying their curiosity in what certainly did not belong to them, he takes the opportunity of acquainting them with what they were particularly

¹ Matt. xxiv. 36.

² Job xiv. 14.

concerned. “ *It is not for you to know the times or seasons*, but it is of material importance to you to be informed of the influence of that Holy Spirit which will ere long be given to you; in consequence of which you will be required to bear testimony to the truth, not in Jerusalem only, to which you have hitherto been restrained, but in every neighbouring country to which you may be called; nay, some of you must bear this witness in the most distant regions of the earth.”

In the midst of this interesting discourse, even *while he blessed them*¹, the awful circumstance of the Ascension took place. From a part of mount Olivet, where they were then assembled, to which place they had been purposely led out by the Saviour himself, while they beheld, he was taken up. No sudden and unaccountable disappearance happened; no method of concealment imposed itself on an inattentive assembly; *while they beheld*, he was taken up. Nay more, their imaginations were not confused, so as to render their sight uncertain. “ They looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up.” And a *cloud* received him out of their sight.” The interposition of a cloud is not without its moral reference. It resembles the veil of flesh which separates us from Christ, and from the glorious prospect of his heavenly kingdom. O come that blessed time when the Saviour of the world shall appear unveiled before us! He is gone, by his mediation and intercession with

¹ Luke xxiv. 51.

our Almighty Father, to prepare a mansion for us. *In heart and mind, therefore, let us also thither ascend*; and though fettered to this terrestrial habitation, let us so fulfil the purposes of his will, that we may *with him perpetually dwell*, lead a faithful and spiritual life here, and become worthy, through his merits, of a distinguished seat in his kingdom of glory hereafter.

St. Luke does not say that our Lord was taken up *in a cloud*, as Elijah was by a whirlwind in a *fiery chariot with horses of fire*¹, surrounded with angelic appearances, bright and visible to the eye, but implies that his venerable form, gradually rising from the earth, became invisible to mortal sight as he entered the cloud;—*the cloud received him*. Those disciples that had been present at his transfiguration, saw here the completion of that change which was then offered to their eyes. If they were there allowed a transient view of immortality, here it was displayed before them in the strongest colours. And lest any part of this most interesting scene should escape the astonished Apostles, a vision of angels, like those which attended near the sepulchre of Christ, made its appearance near them, and roused all their attention by an impressive revelation; a revelation which proclaimed the second coming of Messiah with power and great glory. “Ye men of Galilee, said the angels, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so

¹ 2 Kings ii. 11.

come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." This was a confirmation to them of the sublime vision of Daniel. "And I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed¹." This declaration could not but make the most powerful impression on the minds of the Apostles. More than this they could not want, to confirm their faith in him who, in so visible a manner, had "brought life and immortality to light;" yet *even more than this* he afforded them not many days after, when he sent the Holy Spirit, according to his promise, to comfort them; by his influence and assistance to enable them to discharge the duties of that arduous office to which he had appointed them: and finally, to exalt them, and all faithful people, to the same place whither he was gone before.

The reflections which ought to attend upon a proper consideration of the account of the Ascension are too obvious to be here enlarged upon; they embrace a full and comprehensive meditation on all the benefits of redemption. The exaltation of Jesus is the consequence of his humiliation; and

¹ Dan. vii. 14.

by his meritorious death and sufferings are all sinners rescued from the tyranny of Satan, and entitled to the blessing of salvation. “After he had offered one sacrifice for sins, he for ever sat down on the right hand of God¹ ;” an expression agreeing with St. Mark’s reflection, “He was received up into heaven, *and sat on the right hand of God*² ;” implying the dignity to which the human nature of Christ was exalted, and the good effects of that exaltation. Happy consideration for sinful man ! for the good-will of our Saviour is thus carried, with full effect, to the throne of the great Father of the Universe, where it pleads our pardon and forgiveness with never-ceasing ardour and intreaty. “If God be for us, who can be against us ? It is Christ who died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who ever liveth, and maketh intercession for us³ .” Such then is the hope, such the expectation, and such the privileges of Christians. Let us then neither forfeit these privileges, reject this hope, nor renounce these expectations, by any rash or disobedient conduct. If we wish to go *where Christ is*, we must by faith lay hold upon the salvation which he offers ; we must build up ourselves a spiritual house ; as much as may be, “not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but we must be holy, and without blemish⁴ .” “Let the same mind,” the same heavenly temper and disposition, “be in

¹ Heb. x. 12.

² Mark xvi. 19.

³ Rom. viii. 31. 34.

⁴ Ephes. v. 27.

us, which was also in Christ Jesus¹ ;” “for every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure².” Let us then “have our conversation in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself³.”

As soon as the important transaction of the Ascension was past, the disciples returned from mount Olivet; which St. Luke here says is *a sabbath day's journey*⁴, that is, five furlongs, or three quarters of a mile, from Jerusalem. His meaning is, that the foot, or first rise of the mountain itself, not the very spot of Christ's ascension from it, is at that distance, which clearly reconciles this passage with that of the same author, where he says that our Saviour ascended *at* Bethany, which was on the eastern side of Olivet, and was fifteen furlongs, or more than twice the distance.

From this mount it was that our Saviour saw, and wept over, while he predicted the destruction of the holy city. In the retirement of a garden at this place, he passed whole nights in prayer: to this spot he frequently resorted with his disciples,

¹ Phil. ii. 5. ² 1 John iii. 3. ³ Phil. iii. 20, 21.

⁴ Perhaps, says Dr. Benson, the decree which restricted the Jews from walking beyond this distance on the Sabbath-day, arose from a similar distance between the ark, and the nearest part of the camp, when Israel was encamped in the wilderness. Josh. xiii. 4. Numb. xxxv. 4, 5.

that he might, without interruption, prepare their minds for the great scenes in which they were to be engaged: here it was his passion began; here he underwent his dreadful agony; here he was betrayed, taken, and from hence ascended *to Father and our Father, to his God and our God*¹. Returning from the sacred mount, we may imagine what a variety of sensations, what an elevation of thought, would naturally occupy the minds of the disciples. We shall not, therefore, wonder when we find them, immediately on their return, assembled with our Lord's nearest and dearest friends according to the flesh, that they might give way to those sublime feelings which laboured in their breasts. "They all continued *with one accord* in prayer and supplication." How soothing is the spirit of prayer to the soul laden with affliction! Unanimity in devotion, on such occasions, is the very voice of nature, as well as of religion. We join together in the love of kindred, of friends, of all mankind, as an endearing expression of our *love to God*; an expression, which cannot fail of being acceptable to him, whose love for us sent his *own Son* to be a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins.

Nor was sorrow the only, or even chief, sensation of their hearts. They could not but recollect, in this awful moment, the promise he had made them. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart, (and they had just seen him depart) I will send him unto

¹ John xx. 17.

you¹.” “ And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe².”

The disciples, we may observe, were now assembled in an *upper room*; that is, according to the mode of architecture in those countries, in one of the largest and most frequented rooms of the house, which, contrary to *our* custom, usually occupied the highest part of the building. This circumstance we may attribute to the change of mind which began now to take place in the disciples. Immediately after the resurrection, they met clandestinely in a private apartment, where the doors were shut—St. John expressly says, *for fear of the Jews*. At present the scene is changed. Greater confidence had taken possession of their breasts; their numbers began to multiply; as it appears that some of our Lord's kindred, who formerly did not believe in him, now made a part of this devout assembly; and they met in a more open manner, regardless of public or private enemies. Some commentators have imagined that this upper room was situated in a part of the temple, where such apartments have been described; and, because it is said, that the disciples after this period, were *continually in the temple*. But this is straining the expression beyond its meaning, as it is very unlikely that the Jewish rulers should suffer poor fishermen, and others of equally low occupations of life, to make use of such a distinguished place. We must

¹ John xvi. 7.

² Ib. xiv. 30.

therefore look for the upper room of the Apostles in some other quarter of Jerusalem ¹.

Such were the first rudiments of the Christian Church, considered as an assembled body. Though we shall have occasion to meet with it again, very soon after, in a much augmented state, I cannot omit to remark its first blessed appearance. “The kingdom of heaven,” said our Saviour, that is, his pure and invaluable Gospel, “is *like a grain of mustard-seed*.” It has already, from a small and tender plant, become a large and spreading tree. But we still look with confidence for its further growth. We bless the first dawning of its glory. Let us pray for the continuance of its prosperity. Let us do more; let us contribute all the powers of our minds, and the strength of our bodies, to promote the spiritual happiness of the Christian Church; let us dedicate our whole existence to make it a *glorious Church*; let us accept, with grateful thanks, the offered salvation of our Saviour, and let us supplicate the divine Spirit of grace to form a *new creation* in our souls.

“*In those days*,” that is, in the interval between

¹ Ancient writers have imagined that this upper room was situated, though not *in* the temple, on a part of mount Sion; thence it was called *cœnaculum Sion*. It is also said, that a church was founded here by the Apostles; at least, that one was here dedicated to Christian service. In later times, Helena mother of the Emperor Constantine, built a magnificent temple on the spot, which afterwards became a monastery of Franciscans, or Minorites; till at length, in 1561, it was translated into a Turkish palace. See Staveland's *Hist. of Churches in England*, p. 32.

the day of the Ascension and that of Pentecost, which happened ten days after, the Christian congregation being assembled, in number about an hundred and twenty, St. Peter, whose zeal for his master's service had been even more apparent than his fault, addressed his brethren, with reference to the prophetic writings, that they should elect a successor to the unworthy Judas. The melancholy end of this apostate disciple he particularly describes, that this instance of revolt against a kind and unoffending master, might be held forth as a tremendous example of a condemning conscience. In this short harangue, the Apostle briefly mentions the qualification of the person who should be elected; that he must be one well acquainted with the public, and the private, life of Jesus, his heavenly doctrines, and surprising miracles, and particularly one who had been a witness of his resurrection. He also notices, in few words, the office he is required to fill—in the language of David, adapted to the present circumstances of the case—*his bishopric let another take*¹. In the prayer which soon follows, he calls it *his ministry and apostleship*. His meaning is evident, the office was that of one of the supreme directors of the Christian Church. The word *ἐπισκοπος*, from whence the name of the office is derived, which we translate Bishop, literally signifies an Overseer, or Inspector; and, in this place, implies that he should be of equal rank with the primitive Apos-

¹ Psalm cix. 8.

ties, and direct, with them, the important affairs which began then to present themselves to their view. The Apostles, therefore, were the first Bishops. "In fact, there was no other difference between the Apostles and the Bishops but this: the Apostles being confessedly the first planters of the Gospel, were general and ambulatory (or travelling) Bishops, having the care and superintendency of all the Churches; but bishops were Apostles fixed to the jurisdiction of one city or province¹." The nature of this office has continued the same through all succeeding generations of Christians to the present hour, in such Churches as receive its jurisdiction. And it is a great and satisfactory confirmation of our adoption of this form of Church-Government, that it is to be found in every age of the Church; and was never questioned till the modern principles of a political republic endeavoured to adapt themselves to the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs. Considered in this light, which is apparently the true one, who can properly appreciate the importance and responsibility of the office? In the earliest era of the Church it was held by very eminent Apostles, who bore the strongest testimony to the faith, and sealed it by their blood. It was afterwards possessed by very valuable men, many of whom became martyrs in the same holy cause. More peaceable times, in the succession of ages, afforded several amiable examples of Church-Governors; however

¹ Daubeney, App. p. 79.

some may be pointed out, in very dark and superstitious periods, justly to be reprehended for an inconsistent assumption of secular power, for worldly cares, and even for heresy in religion. In our own days, we can behold, in many instances, venerable Fathers holding the same eminent situation, according to the alterations which time has wrought in the outward appearance of the world; men equally qualified to defend the true and apostolic faith, and equally strenuous to support it.

In the place of Judas, two candidates appeared to fill up the vacancy in the assembly of Apostles: "Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias." The harmony which prevailed at this election is greatly worthy of imitation. Here were no difference of opinions, or heats of passion. The primitive principle of love distinguished them, as the immediate scholars of a most divine master. Two good men were presented to their choice, and the decision was left to Heaven. "And they gave forth the lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles."

In this place the proceeding is worthy of observation. Chance and fortune are terms amongst men, which imply uncertainty, too frequently excluding a dependence upon Providence. But nothing happens by *chance*. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the sole disposing thereof is the Lord's¹." Can we, who are not ignorant of the good, or evil, con-

¹ Prov. xvi. 33.

connected with every event, imagine that it is a matter of total indifference which shall prevail? Such an imagination would remove from us the superintendence of a kind Providence, and plunge us in the unfathomable depths of a fatal necessity. The argument arising from the nature of *prayer*, casts a very particular light upon this subject. Whether the affairs of life be directed by chance, or determined by an uncontrollable necessity, in either case an application to a superior Being would be absurd and unavailing. But prayer is one of the earliest dictates of nature, as well as a positive precept of revelation. The Apostles, at the election of Matthias, shewed, by their practice, what their sentiments were, of the divine interposition. Nay, as men fully impressed with the pure principles of their Christian vocation, they addressed their prayer to that Master who had so lately left them, and who had not long before told them, “I and my Father are one¹.” “And they prayed and said, Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship.—And the lot fell upon Matthias.”

From this proceeding we are taught a very useful and important lesson; never to commence any business of moment or consequence, without imploring the assistance of Heaven. In this the true devotion of the heart consists. The blessing of *Providence* is a most invaluable gift, and with-

¹ John x. 30.

out it, no work of the hands, or meditation of the heart, can be expected to prosper!

The Apostles used the appointment by lot in the ordination of their first associate, that the *immediate* hand of Christ might be, as it were, placed upon him. The imposition of hands on ordained Bishops, and Presbyters, or Priests, was adopted after the more full effusion of the Holy Spirit. God establishes his own Church after his own manner, and “gave some Apostles, some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers¹.” Every superior and inferior office we shall behold arising in the Church according to the exigence and circumstance of the time.

We have seen the *lot* of Matthias. Let us not neglect our *own*, whatever it may be. In spiritual things our lot is a very fair one, if we do not lose it by our misconduct. To every Christian in this country it may be said, “The lot is fallen upon you in a fair ground; yea, ye have a goodly heritage²;” for “he who seeks the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good.” To be born in a Christian land; to be early received by baptism into a Church reformed from ancient errors, where the sacraments are duly administered, and the food of life plentifully supplied; to see the way made plain before us, from the original condition of man, where sin abounds, to his restoration, through a merciful Redeemer, to all the comforts and rewards promised to the penitent; to participate in

¹ Eph. iv. 11.

² Psalm xvi. 6.

the exquisite satisfaction, not only of following the steps of our Saviour's blessed life, but in reaping the benefit of his death; to be qualified, through his merits, when we resign ourselves to the grave, *to rest in hope*, and when, at the last day, we are delivered from it, to *rise in glory*;—*these, these*, my Brethren, are advantages which none but a God of mercy can bestow, which none but a *pious Christian* can receive.

LECTURE IV.

ACTS II. 1—41.

The Effusion of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, and its happy Consequences. Jerusalem, A. D. 33.

WHEN we reflect on the primitive history of the Apostles, when we attend them in the different stages of their pious travels, when we accompany them in the progress of their preaching, and observe the solemn and gradual disclosure of those divine truths which they were particularly commissioned to inculcate, we feel something like the dawning of a new day, and *the day-star, the bright and morning star* of redemption, *arising in our hearts*. But when we are led by the authentic records of our faith to the *very apartment* where they were so frequently assembled, and which was the first visible Church of Christ; when we there behold the accomplishment of an ancient prophecy, as well as the fulfilling of a sacred promise made by our Lord himself; we exclaim with one voice—“the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth ¹.”

¹ 1 John ii. 8.

What event, in the early history of the Church, is so impressive in its appearance, or so important in its consequences, as the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost ! “ When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all, with one accord, in one place.” The day of Pentecost was a solemn festival of the Jews, so called by the Greeks, because it was holden on the fiftieth day after the Passover, or feast of unleavened bread. *Ye shall count unto you,* says Moses, *from that time seven sabbaths complete*¹, that is, forty-nine days, the fiftieth being the day of the feast. Hence from this particular computation, it was called by the Jews *the feast of weeks* ; on the day after which was celebrated the *day of the first fruits*, because then were offered the first fruits of the second, or wheat harvest. How appropriate was this festival to the wonderful circumstance which now took place upon it ! *The weeks* from the Passover, from the day of our Lord’s resurrection, were counted with diligent care. So looks the anxious eye, so beats the fervent heart, for the expected return of some dear and valuable friend. And when the day was fully come, that friend appears, and brings with him such gifts and graces, as shew the value of his love and friendship. The offering now made was most acceptable ; it was the emblem of plenty and of peace ; the *first fruits* of an abundant harvest. But what are these to the important offering of the *first*

¹ Lev. xxiii. 15.

fruits of the Spirit? The day selected for this purpose was the day following the Jewish Sabbath, that which has since been distinguished by all Christian societies as peculiarly *the Lord's Day*. Thus signifying that all the sanctifying graces are more particularly to be looked for at solemn times, and on sacred occasions. How fully sensible of this are all the pious worshippers of God! It is not amidst the distractions of the world that we can unreservedly devote ourselves to heaven; it is not where pomp and pleasure meet; where worldly cares assault us, or where the dissolute votaries of unrestrained indulgence associate, that we can abstract our minds from ordinary occurrences, or curb our wandering thoughts. Alas! even with our best preparation, we are not able fully to accomplish our purpose. But in any way to succeed, we must seek the Lord *where* he will be found, in the depth of occasional retirement, in the garden, or the chamber, or in his own holy courts, where the pious and the good feel all the raptures of a sincere devotion, and receive the blessings of a liberal and indulgent God.

The Apostles were not only assembled on the great day of the feast, and *in one place*, the accustomed place of their pious meetings, but *with one accord*. I cannot pass over this expression without noticing its beauty and importance. *With one accord!* What harmony of thought and action does that word produce! The grace of God is here promised to divine unity; and it is with peculiar propriety introduced by St. Luke, as a little con-

tention had formerly arisen among the Apostles; they had disputed among themselves "*which of them should be the greatest*¹." The world had not been wholly subdued within their breasts; indeed they had formed false notions of the kingdom of Christ, and expected to be partakers of his temporal dominion. But upon the death of their master, and a clearer intelligence of the end and design of his mission, they became united by the strongest bands; his lessons of peace had taken root in their hearts, and were now beginning to bring forth the most delightful fruits. Different though they were from each other in country, sects, and conditions, they were closely connected in, and by, the love of Christ. "They were all, *with one accord, in one place*." How happy should we be, if such unanimity in conduct, and in worship, could prevail among us! that, as we profess "one faith, one baptism, one hope of our calling²," we should so far divest ourselves of all dissensions in temporal, or in spiritual affairs, as to meet together with one mind, and, as it were, under one roof.

"As the Lord Jesus did nothing without the Father, I use the words of a primitive Father of the Church, (being one with him) either in his own person, or by the Apostles, so also do ye, meeting together in one place, let there be among you one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope of charity, and joy unreprieved. Be ye all united as in the same temple, as before the same altar,

¹ Mark ix. 34.

² Ephes. iv. 4, 5.

through the same Jesus Christ, who coming from the same Father, exists in, and returns to, the same ¹.”

But though this perfect harmony is not to be expected till we all assemble together in the holy and comprehensive temple above, yet let us so far correct our prejudices and passions, as to refrain from unnecessary opposition to those who differ in opinion from ourselves; not indeed letting go our integrity by cherishing errors, (and always condemning dangerous innovations, as well as false and pernicious doctrines) yet endeavouring, according to the utmost of our power, to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ².”

It has been a question, whether the whole number of the disciples, who were assembled in the upper room immediately after the Ascension of our Lord, were joined with the Apostles in the gift of tongues, now about to be communicated. It seems probable that they were not, as it is said that *Peter stood up with the eleven* when he began to speak to the people; and again, at the conclusion of his discourse, they addressed themselves to *Peter and to the rest of the Apostles* exclusively. Though all the followers of Christ, then present, were partakers of the great effusion of the Spirit on this occasion, *one after this manner and another after that*, the particular *gift of tongues* appears to have

¹ Epistle of Ignatius to the Church at Magnesia beside the Meander.

² Ephes. iv. 3.

been confined to the *Apostles*, as those who should first plant the Gospel in different countries; and as an immediate miracle to make a sensible impression on that various multitude, which the providence of God had brought together to Jerusalem at that time.

While the Apostles were thus assembled, there came “a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.” This was an outward sign of some important consequence. An immediate and sensible impulse was felt by all those holy men who were the objects of this visitation. They could be at no loss to understand it, as they were looking for this completion of the promise of their Lord, who had enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem immediately after the Ascension, but to “*wait for the promise of the Father.*”

The manner in which the miraculous effusion of the Spirit was delivered, was emblematic of the manner of its spiritual operation:—“suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind;” so powerful that it has been thought, not without reason, to have been heard both within and without the house, and that it was one of the causes which brought together so great a multitude of people. The margin of our Bible translates the passage, *when the voice was made* the multitude came together. This emblem of wind, in allusion to the Spirit of God, was not altogether unknown to the Apostles. Our Lord himself introduced it in his conference with Nicodemus. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and

thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit¹." The expression, too, is a proof of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit of God, in opposition to the false notions of infidelity, which make no distinction between the natural air, and the influence of the Divine Spirit ; as it would be an absurdity in language to term any thing *an emblem of its own reality*. The expression is, " a sound from heaven *as of a rushing mighty wind*." The effusion of the Spirit was not the wind, but a surprising effect resembling that of the wind. No allusion perhaps can be more appropriate than this : and the variation in the force of the wind itself forms a striking resemblance between the emblematic rushing mighty wind of the Apostles, the powerful and miraculous gifts of the Spirit shed on them on this important occasion, and those heavenly graces which are bestowed by more gentle breathings on the minds of those, who, by faith and patience, inherit the promises.

The rushing emblematic wind was not confined to the sacred apartment where the Apostles were assembled, but we are told that *it filled all the house*. Commentators have said, that *the whole house* represents the world, which was to be filled with the sound of the Gospel. Such allusions may safely be adopted by the pious believer ; but in the revelation of the Spirit of God there is no obscurity in

¹ John iii. 8.

making manifest important truths. It shews itself by indubitable witness, by the revelation of those languages which should propagate the sacred doctrines of Christianity beyond any limits, then known, of human habitations. With greater certainty may we say, that the circumstance of the “rushing wind which filled all the house,” is the accomplishment of that which, in the preceding chapter, our Saviour calls *baptizing* the Apostles *with the Holy Ghost*. “John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence¹.”

Neither was this *rushing wind* the only emblem of the Spirit. To make the miraculous interposition still more an object of observation, “there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” It is unnecessary to rest upon the interpretation of the word *tongues*, or that those tongues were *cloven*, that is, each tongue separated or divided into two parts. The purpose of Providence was fully answered by placing a *visible*, probably a *lambent, flame*, over each of the Apostles, that they themselves, as well as others, might be sensible of the accomplishment of the Baptist’s promise, that, “when Christ came, he should baptize them with the Holy Ghost, and *with fire*².” Water was appointed the element of baptism, both in the Jewish and Christian Churches; here, for evident reasons, the element of fire is introduced. Fire is a much more power-

¹ Acts i. 5.

² Matt. iii. 11.

ful and efficacious purifier than water. In this sense it is frequently used in the Old Testament. "The messenger of the covenant," says Malachi in a very strong passage, shall "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness¹." And was not this particularly the case with the Apostles, thus miraculously purified and baptized with *fire*? In the Old Testament, too, the expression of *fire* is used to denote an inspiration from heaven. When Isaiah, in his vision of the glory of the Lord, impressed with an humble sense of his condition, exclaimed, "Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips: then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, said he, having a live coal in his hand, and he laid it upon my month, and said, Lo! this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send? and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me²." The baptism by fire, therefore, placed the Apostles on the same foundation with the ancient Prophets; and was at the same time a visible confirmation of the miracle to all the surrounding spectators. What must have been their admiration, when they beheld the wonderful consequence of these miraculous appearances? "They were all filled with the

¹ Mal. iii. 3.² Isaiah vi. 5, 6, 7.

Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Thus did the important prediction, which accompanied our Saviour's first commission to his Apostles, begin to be fulfilled:—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. And these signs shall follow them that believe, in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with *new tongues*; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover¹."

The gift of tongues was of that miraculous nature, and made manifest in so particular a manner, that no collusion was even suspected by those who were present. On the contrary, the various multitude which was brought together, and which, by the good providence of God, happened to consist of men born in different regions, and well able to appreciate the new attainment of the Apostles, were *confounded*, were impressed with great emotions, when they heard the languages of their own countries spoken *fluently* and *accurately* (for so the word signifies) by ignorant and uninstructed persons. "Behold! are not all these which speak Galileans?" It was well known in Jerusalem both who they were, and whence they came. In this case, therefore, it would not have been difficult to have detected the smallest imposition. "How

¹ Mark xvi. 15—18.

then, they reasonably inquire, hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites ;” and men, figuratively speaking, from *every quarter of the earth* ¹.”

It is necessary to remark, that the persons here described were not Gentiles, natives, in the strict sense of the word, of the several nations, (for Cornelius was the first Gentile convert) but Jews of the several dispersions, such as those to whom St. James directs his Epistle, “ To the twelve tribes scattered abroad ² ;” men born, or settled, in foreign countries, some now dwelling in Jerusalem, others making a temporary abode, to attend the public services of the temple there at the time of Pentecost ; for which reason they are termed *religiosi*, pious or *devout men*.

Here then let us pause, and adore the wisdom and providence of Almighty God in so ordering the first publication of the Gospel, that the fame of it, and of that convincing miracle which gave

¹ “ It has been said, that the gift of tongues continued for a considerable time to be absolutely necessary for the spreading of Christianity ; but it is to be observed, that the Scriptures never say so. The Jews and Proselytes then at Jerusalem served to carry Christianity with them to their several homes. Afterwards the Ethiopian eunuch, &c. were converted. By these, and by the travels of some of the Apostles, and of their disciples, Christianity was spread in the Roman empire, and in the East ; and then the Greek language, together with human industry in learning other tongues, might be sufficient to convey the Gospel as far, and as soon, as Providence intended.” Jortin’s Rem. on Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 16.

² James i. 1.

authority to it, might be carried into *all nations* by so many both ear and eye witnesses of it, as those Jews were. And while we recollect the purpose of their thus appearing at Jerusalem, we cannot but be satisfied of the blessed opportunities and means for salvation which *they* met with who came thither to worship; and which all the faithful will never fail to meet with, when they leave behind them all their worldly cares, and exert every faculty, both of mind and body, in attending upon the Lord in the public service of the sanctuary. For had those Jews staid at home as the rest of their brethren did, when their duty called them to Jerusalem, they had not been partakers of such a blessing, nor witnesses of so wonderful a miracle for the confirmation of their faith, as they now were. ¹

While *these*, with reverence and astonishment, exclaim, “What meaneth this?” *others*, more sceptical in their hearts, and less willing to put a favourable interpretation on a circumstance for which they could not account; being, at the same time, it is probable, *native Jews*, and not understanding the languages which were spoken; began to deride them, saying, “These men are full of new wine.” This intemperate observation called up the bold and energetic Peter, who became here for the first time a *rock* of defence in his Master’s service. Supported by the eleven, he rose with dignity and warmth to repel this unworthy insinuation.

From the peculiar cast of the history of the

¹ Joseph Mede’s Works, p. 76.

Acts, the book affords many valuable instances of sacred oratory from some of the primitive Apostles. Not less than twenty-two sermons, or popular addresses, are to be met with in this book, which exhibit to us both the nature of the arguments used in their preaching, and the power with which they spake.

The audience consisting principally, if not wholly, of Jews, or Jewish converts, St. Peter draws his strongest evidence from the Old Testament, and applies a prophecy of Joel ¹ to the uncommon circumstances of the day. He tells them, that *in the last days*, which they all understood to mean the times of the Messiah, God had promised to pour out his Spirit upon *all flesh*, Gentiles as well as Jews ; and as a sign of what he was able to perform, he predicts the destruction of the nation ; adding, that to avoid this great catastrophe, and entitle themselves to the rewards of a new kingdom, they must seek a new master ; that they, and they only, who shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved, shall escape from this threatened destruction, as well as from eternal punishment. That this Master was not a stranger among them, however he had been despised, but that he was *appointed*, marked out by the predetermination of God, to effect the great purposes of man's redemption ; and whom, though crucified and slain, God had raised from the dead. This introduces a prophecy of David, which, from the

¹ Chap. ii. 28, 29.

expression, that God *did not leave his soul in hell*¹, (that is, the grave, or rather the place of separate spirits) neither did he *suffer his Holy One to see corruption*, could not possibly apply to David in any sense, but applies most remarkably to Him, of whom David was, in this respect, the type. Jesus rose from the dead; David rose not from the dead; David ascended not into heaven; but Jesus, according to another prophecy of David, ascended into heaven, and *sat on the right hand of God*², the place to which, the Scripture informs us, he was exalted after his Ascension. From these prophecies, St. Peter passes on to the miracle, and emphatically refers to this great effusion of the Spirit, this open, unadorned miracle of speaking *new tongues*, the effect of which was now both seen and heard. The inference which he draws from these considerations, the House of Israel, as he informs them, believing in these Scriptures, could not but acknowledge to be just; that “God had made *that same Jesus*, whom they had crucified, that Jesus of Nazareth whom he preached, both Lord and Christ;” the true Messiah, the Saviour of man, the head and completion of the Gospel dispensation.

The immediate effect of this discourse was more powerful than any which could have been produced by merely human argument. Prophecy and miracle happily conspired to render the hearts of the hearers a soil proper for the reception of the

¹ Psalm xvi. 10.

² Ibid. cx. 1.

blessed Spirit of God. Many of them had assented to the death of Jesus. Being now sensible of his sacred character, they were struck with compunction, "they were pricked in their hearts," as it is translated; they felt, what all those experience, who, by their sins, *crucify the Lord of life afresh*, and once more put him to an open shame. They apply to Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, "Men! *Brethren!* what shall we do?" How shall we obtain remission of this sin? What hope remains for us? Let every sinner hear the gracious answer (for whatever sin doth most easily beset him, is included in a firm rejection, or denial, of his Saviour) "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The divine blessing, the free unmerited grace of God, will fall abundantly on the heart of the penitent; but to make this blessing productive, he must "bring forth fruits meet for repentance¹." His soul must undergo, in Scripture language, a *new creation*; he must "die unto sin, that he may live unto righteousness." No superficial holiness will effect this happy purpose; even the waters of baptism, all-sanctifying as they are, though calculated for this very end, and producing it in the regenerate heart, will be wasted, or profaned, by an unprofitable participation of them. Neither is there reason to suppose that a miracle will be performed for the conversion of

¹ Matt. iii. 8.

every sinner. Miraculous gifts, for express purposes, accompanied the preaching of the Apostles, but the ordinary influences of the Spirit are of a different nature ; at least, they are communicated in a different manner. Yet even these so effectually take possession of the heart, as to render it (what, I pray God, all may have occasion to experience) a residence fit for the reception of so holy an inhabitant. But to invite this holy visitor, much, very much preparation is required. Even on this occasion, St. Peter was obliged to lengthen his earnest exhortation. “ With many *other words* did he testify, and exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Rest not yourselves inactive, under an expectation that God’s Spirit will come to you uncalled ; for though it is *by grace ye are saved*¹, yet remember, *through faith* must be the passage to it ; a *faith* which in all true believers *worketh by love* ; a faith which is verily and indeed the unmerited *gift of God*. “ Save yourselves therefore from this untoward generation.” Escape, as Lot did out of Sodom, and trust not yourselves for one moment to look behind you. “ Resist the devil, and he will flee from you².” Such power hath God given to those who thus endeavour to *work out their own salvation*. Put away from you the evil of your doings ; believe in Christ, not only as one whose precepts charm you, and whose character delights, but as your sole refuge and Redeemer, as one without

¹ Ephes. ii. 5.² James iv. 7.

whose shelter and protection you must be miserable ; but, having him, you have all that the heart of man can desire.

To us too it may be said, as it was at this time to the unbelieving Jews, “ Repent ; ”—for men of every rank and quality, of every age and nation, need repentance. “ Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,” for this is a positive ordinance, and an indispensable obligation, on entering the Christian Covenant. But if you have already been baptized, which, I trust, is the case with all that hear me, and do not repent according to the injunction of our Saviour, and the preaching of his Apostles, your spiritual life, believe me, has not yet begun ; there is no harshness in saying, “ *ye are yet in your sins.* ” For, (to change a little the expression of St. Paul ¹) as he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, so neither is he a Christian who is one outwardly, neither can that be called baptism which is merely outward in the flesh ; but he only is a Christian who is one inwardly, and true baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter only ; that is, that the outward form is not by any means to supersede, or render ineffectual, the spiritual signification.

When we have meditated on all the circumstances of this wonderful chapter, our minds, by the blessing of God, will be fully prepared for the important consequence which followed. “ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized,

¹ Rom. ii. 28, 29.

and *the same day* there were added unto them about *three thousand souls* ! Blessed be God's name for this happy introduction of his Gospel ! May it increase, by his powerful assistance, in every realm and nation ! May it produce in us every spiritual comfort, every Christian grace ! In every trial of our faith, in every affliction, whether of mind or body, still let the overruling influence of God's Holy Spirit invigorate and refresh our hearts ; still let us look up to that Comforter, who, we are assured, will abide with us for ever ; *even the Spirit of truth, whom the world, the carnal world, cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him* (said Christ to his disciples, and in them to all the faithful) *for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you* ¹ : and let us revive under the impression of his last powerful and affectionate promise :—" I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU COMFORTLESS ; I WILL COME UNTO YOU ²."

¹ John xiv. 17.

² Ibid. xviii.

LECTURE V.

ACTS II. 42.—CHAP. III.

Lives and Manners of the first Converts of the Gospel—Miraculous cure of a lame Man—Peter's Address to the People on that Occasion, Jerusalem, A.D. 33.

A CONTEMPLATION of the means used by Divine Providence to effect its purposes, is both interesting and striking; interesting, as we are ourselves the objects of its care, and striking, as the ends are frequently produced by methods, not only above, but contrary to, all human reasoning. “Are not my ways higher than your ways, says God by his prophet, and my thoughts than your thoughts¹?” In opposition to all ordinary arguments, the same circumstances, in the hand of heaven, do not always produce the same effects; though they are always so modelled by Supreme Wisdom, as to bring forth that event which is most salutary to the general ends of creation. The rain, which at some seasons refreshes the earth, and is the efficient cause of its beauty and fertility, at other times destroys the labour of the husbandman, and

¹ Isaiah lv. 9.

maketh the land barren *for the wickedness of them that dwell therein*. The gift of tongues, which, as we have seen in the last lecture, was given as a blessing to the primitive Church, and doubtless was of the greatest efficacy in promoting the happy influence of the Gospel, in more early times was bestowed as a punishment for the haughtiness and uncontrollable ambition of mankind. “Behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do,” to shew their arrogance and their pride. “Let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. Thus did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth¹.” Such was the effect of the miraculous introduction of a variety of languages on the plains of Babel; but the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost, in the metropolis of Judea, produced very contrary, and much happier effects. It prepared the way for arranging all the present and future followers of Christ under one supreme director, that they might be *one fold under one shepherd*. It opened the sweet springs of salvation in every climate, and made all partakers of its benefits. Whatever country feels the influence of our Saviour’s love, that country may truly be said clearly to understand his language, like the first converts at Jerusalem; whilst those who taste not *how gracious the Lord is*, are like the builders at Babel, they hear indeed the voice, but understand not the language which

¹ Gen. xi. 6, 7.

is spoken unto them. When the good shepherd "putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice ¹." The introduction of new tongues at Babel rendered language of little use to those who were then assembled; it confounded all, it dispersed all. The gift of tongues at Jerusalem had a different effect; it collected all true believers, as it were, into one place; it formed one happy brotherhood, and presented salvation to those who were near, and to those who were afar off. The one was a mark of the carnal, the other of the spiritual life; for "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ²."

When the great effusion of the Holy Spirit had taken place, it is natural to inquire, what impression so important a circumstance made on the minds of all who were acquainted with it? Those who were not converts beheld it with reverential awe. The history informs us, "Fear came upon *every soul*." Happy prelude in many, to a further, and more perfect, knowledge of the truth; which the "signs and wonders of the Apostles" were intended to confirm! But alas! fatal, very fatal to those who resisted this warning. "If I had not come and spoken to them, (said our Lord on another important occasion) they had not had sin, but now they have no cloke for their sin ³." With how much real fear and apprehension ought every man, born and educated in a Christian country, to hear

¹ John x. 4.² 1 Cor. xv. 22.³ John xv. 22.

these words ?—" If ye know these things, my brethren, happy are ye if ye do them ¹."

The lives and manners of the new converts were of a description truly according with the new profession of religion. I recur not here to any history, but that which is now before us ; and where else can we expect to find a more pleasing picture of all that is amiable, of all that is instructive, in Christianity ? As *charity*, in the true sense of the word, as the love of mankind founded on the love of God through Christ, as a perfect and more exalted holiness, animated their whole conduct, we behold nothing but that happy community of sentiments which is the ornament and perfection of the Christian Covenant. Having saved themselves, by the glad tidings just presented to them, from the sins and iniquities of an " untoward," a depraved generation, having separated themselves from a dangerous and destructive society ; according to the admonition of Peter, they associated in kind and friendly intercourse with their great deliverers, the Apostles and first followers of their blessed Master. " They continued stedfastly *in the Apostles' doctrine* ;" in hearing the Apostles declare unto them the way of salvation, and bringing forth in themselves the genuine fruits of the Spirit ; " in fellowship," that is, not communion, but communication, a generous and unaffected liberality to all their brethren ; " in breaking of bread," in the administration and participation, as

¹ John x. 17.

it is imagined, of the Lord's Supper, but certainly in exercising an open and unreserved hospitality ; " and in prayer," in addressing their united petitions to their great Creator, through Him who alone makes all our prayers acceptable, and who says, " Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you ¹."

Whose heart does not burn within him, when he is informed of such a state of society, as he in vain can hope to see ? Yet may every man, within his own breast, establish such a community of graces, as the God of Christians will look upon with pleasure. " All that believed were together, and had all things common." This expression neither means that they assembled at one time in one place, nor that they resigned all particular interest in the property which they possessed. It must be remembered, with respect to the former observation, that the Christian society now consisted of at least three thousand one hundred and twenty persons, too many assuredly to associate together in any sense of the word ; and with regard to property, it is evident they had not parted with all their interest in it, as some, we afterwards find, sold such possessions as they had, to be distributed for charitable purposes ; which they could not have done, had they literally had *all things common*. A general, a liberal, and friendly communication is all that is meant to be expressed. This is a reasonable interpretation ; and the nearer

¹ John xiv. 13.

we can approach to it in our conduct, the more bright will those good works shine, which spring out of a pure and lively faith.

Nor shall we wonder that such a proof of their religious principles, captivated even those who were unwilling to imitate their conduct. They saw them daily frequenting the temple, the appointed place of public worship; they saw them associating together, as St. Luke expresses it, *with gladness and singleness of heart*; they saw them praise God with that devotion which hypocrisy cannot offer; and therefore they were disposed to regard them with a favourable eye. For who, might they reasonably argue, has more reason to rejoice than a true believer? Who partakes less of the cares and tumults of life, than he who possesses his heart in simplicity and godly sincerity?

A faith so pure, and a conduct so irreproachable, were likely to produce the most beneficial effects to the Christian Church; which was immediately the case. The Lord added daily to this heavenly society *such as should be saved*. The expression gives no latitude to a particular election or predestination, in opposition to the melancholy doctrine of reprobation; it signifies *the saved*, that is, those who were called to save themselves from an ungodly generation, to separate themselves from the Jewish faith, and to join themselves to that purer establishment under *Him* who came to abolish the ceremonies of the law, and to introduce the blessings of the Gospel. Thus St. Paul says, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish fool-

ishness, but to us who are saved (τοις σωζομενοις, the same expression) *the saved*, it is the power of God¹;" which is still more clearly manifested in another passage, "I declare unto you the Gospel which I have preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye *are saved*²."

The conduct of the Apostles, at this moment so important to the interests of the Gospel, was earnest and indefatigable in the highest degree. Weighty indeed was the concern which the Holy Ghost had laid upon them, and strenuous the exertions which their employments required. They had now begun to feel the great end of their mission, and they used every opportunity to promote it. While the first impression of their preaching was strong upon the people, they frequented such public situations as might present to them the greatest concourse of people. The temple of the Jews was of this description; its avenues and porches were spacious, and it was the constant resort of great numbers, not only of the pious and devout, but of others, who, for various purposes, might be led thither. The Apostles, we are told, *continued daily in the temple*. Their own devotion, we may imagine, was a primary motive of their resorting thither; it was a place of *public worship*. Much did they need the assistance of Heaven; much did they implore it. Let their example operate strongly upon our minds, that every un-

¹ 1 Cor. i. 18.

² 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2.

dertaking should be begun, continued, and ended, under the protection of our Heavenly Director. Let this be the test of the true principles of our employment; for if we dare not pronounce one prayer for its success, it stands condemned, as an unworthy allotment of our time. This it is, *to pray always*, to be always in a disposition to pray; and when an opportunity offers, not to content ourselves with our solitary, though it may be proper devotion, but to go up with Peter and John at the ninth hour, (according to our computation of time at three in the afternoon) the usual hour of offering the evening sacrifice; *at any hour* when we are called to this duty; for, “where two or three are gathered together *in my name*, says our Lord, there am I in the midst of them¹.”

As these holy men were ascending to the temple for these holy purposes, a certain man (*τις αὐτῶν*) a well-known person, afflicted by a lameness, deemed incurable, as it was a natural infirmity, was daily placed near that gate of the temple which was called *Beautiful*, to receive the casual benefactions of the pious. These minute circumstances plainly manifest the reality of the situation which they describe. They refer to a particular person, and a particular place. From a knowledge of the former, it was easy to prove, or disprove, the whole truth of his story; and the situation of the latter was known to every Jew. The Jewish historian mentions, that the other gates of the temple were

¹ Matt. xviii. 20.

covered with silver, and then gilt ; but that this, which was emphatically called Beautiful, was constructed of *Corinthian brass*, a more precious metal, “ much exceeding, he says, those of gold and silver ¹.”

The distressed beggar supplicated the same alms from Peter and John which he had been accustomed to receive from the compassionate. But the Apostles had much superior blessings to bestow. “ Peter, fastening his eyes on him, with John, said, Look on us.” They called his attention to them, not merely to excite hope and expectation, but that he might particularly observe the nature of the miracle, of which he was to be the happy object. “ Silver and gold (says St. Peter) have I none ;” in this respect I am as poor as you, but in others I am rich, richer than many who have bountifully administered to your necessities. I am rich in the gifts and graces of a new revelation. “ In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” The miracle was immediate—he assisted the lame man with his hand, and—he *leaped and walked*—he did, what ought to be the first action of every man after a recovery from sickness, or a restoration from any other dangerous calamity, he “ *entered into the temple, and praised God.*”

With respect to this miracle, we may observe, that the faith of the lame man was no way consulted on this occasion. Though it evidently be-

¹ Jos. De B. Jud. l. 5. c. 3.

came the cause of his conversion, it was performed for the general benefit. Multitudes, from this moment, dated the important change which took place in their hearts. It was of the nature of our Lord's prayer at the resurrection of Lazarus: "Because of the people which stand by I said it, that they might believe that thou hast sent me ¹."

Though we have not the power of saying to the decrepit and distressed, *Rise up and walk*; though St. Peter's expression, *Silver and gold have I none*, may, in every sense, be applicable to ourselves; yet let us not imagine, that we are therefore discharged from the duty of alleviating the miseries of our fellow-creatures. Infirmary of mind is far more distressing, sin is a much more inveterate disorder, than the most incurable, the most painful, *bodily* disease. These we may, and, whenever we are able, ought to attempt to relieve; and in these cures, by the grace of God, we may often be successful. "Silver and gold have I none, but *such as I have* give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up" from the burthen of thy sins, "and walk" in newness of life. Then, in more than a literal sense, "shall the lame man leap as an hart;" then "the tongue of the dumb shall sing ²."

This was the first instance of the exertion of the miraculous powers of the Apostles after the descent of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord, while he was yet among them, had confirmed to them the truth

¹ John xi. 42.

² Isa. xxxv. 6.

of his mission by miracles. The same testimony which they received, they were enabled to bestow ; “ they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following ¹.” The witness of the truth by miracles, almost every one is able to understand. It is an argument addressed to our senses. If the action which is displayed be above the ordinary powers of nature, we know that it must be effected by that divine exertion which first called the world itself into being, and controuls all its motions and revolutions. And if this extraordinary exertion be allowed to man, it is evident that he works, not with his own power, but with the power of God. The end too for which the miracle is wrought, is an additional evidence of the truth. “ If I by the finger of God (said our Lord himself) cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come unto you ².” No trifling cause can be expected to occasion the exertion of such powers. Nothing less than to display the omnipotence of God himself, can be supposed a sufficient motive to alter the established course of nature. And how can that omnipotence be more clearly manifested, than in redeeming man from sin, in reforming a vicious world by the introduction of a new revelation ? The religion of Christ had no worldly power to support it. External advantages it possessed not ; it needed not ; for God himself, by the ministry of his Son, and his Apostles, gave

¹ Mark xvi. 20.

² Luke xi. 20.

ample and miraculous testimony of its truth ; and for this important reason, that “ their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God ¹.”

But though miracles were necessary to introduce Christianity (and we find from historic evidence that they were employed for this purpose for a limited period, even after the age of the Apostles) yet they certainly were not necessary to continue it. If we establish the truth of the divine writings, we bring, as it were, the miracle before our own eyes ; and the same application holds good to us which our Lord himself addresses to the Jews : “ If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead ².”

These reflections will shew us the absurdity of attending to the pretended and superstitious miracles of a corrupted Church. They were the offspring of a dark age, and were calculated to *make a gain of godliness*. But the enlightened, even of that Church, now disclaim them ; although a policy, highly to be deprecated, has produced some modern instances of their continuance.

The true nature of a miracle was immediately explained by St. Peter to the poor grateful mendicant, who had been the object of one, as well as to the numerous concourse of people who were attracted by its performance. All the parties interested were assembled in Solomon’s porch. The

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 5.

² Luke xvi. 31.

people ran together unto them, greatly wondering at so uncommon a transaction. The time, the place, the audience, and above all the miracle, called forth once more the zealous eloquence of Peter :—
“ Ye men of Israel ! why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ?” The expression here shews us, that miracles were not vouchsafed for any pre-eminent quality in the instruments. It would have been needless to have made the observation, had not a treasury of the merits of the Saints been an acknowledged doctrine of the Romish Church. Peter warmly disclaims their *own power or holiness*, as having any influence on the divine dispensations. The whole tenor of the Gospel holds the same language ; and the unaffected humility of every good Christian’s mind attests it. “ By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God ; not of works, lest any man should boast ¹.”

Having shewn that it was not by their own authority that this miracle was done, it became necessary to declare *who* was indeed the author of it. As his auditors were Jews, and as the new religion was to be perfective of the old, St. Peter’s arguments might be expected to be such as should, in a national view, strongly interest their attention. He commences therefore with a declaration, that *the God of their fathers*, whom he mentions by a

¹ Ephes. ii. 8.

well-known and endearing appellation, “ the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob,” had glorified in an especial manner *his Son Jesus* ; emphatically *his Son*, as he had been so declared by “ a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ¹.” This beloved Son he had glorified by a visible ascension into heaven, and by the supernatural gifts he had commissioned him to bestow, whilst they had denied and rejected him ; nay, at the judgment-seat of Pilate, they had preferred one who had taken away life, to him who could have given it, even the *prince of life* himself ; he who alone was “ the way, and the truth, and life ;” whose power extended not only to raise the natural dead to a natural life, but to restore those who were *dead in trespasses and sins*, to a new and spiritual existence ; which, through his grace, would conduct them to life everlasting. Having thus introduced the true Messiah to their knowledge, the Apostle points *him* out as the sole author of this great miracle. “ And his name,” he says, “ through faith in his name,” hath given complete bodily strength to this man whom ye see now before you, and whose infirmities have so long merited your compassion. *Through faith in his name* ; faith, not of the man, for he was ignorant of his restorer, but of Peter. Thus Christ was the meritorious cause, Peter the instrumental one, of the man’s restoration. But let our faith imitate that of Peter, instead of continuing, like the lame man, ig-

¹ Matt. iii. 17.

norant of the Author of our Salvation : so shall a time come, when “ we shall know him even as we are known,” when our feeble powers shall be strengthened, and we shall receive that “ perfect soundness,” which will peculiarly distinguish the true disciples of Christ.

The Apostle then intimates, that, possibly, through *ignorance* they had thus rejected their deliverer. But to many it was a wilful ignorance, which they now were called upon to remove ; as all that Christ had suffered, if they would examine, they would find foretold by those very prophets, whose predictions, in other instances, they believed. Ignorance may be an excuse for those who *have never known*, who *never could have known*, Christ. Their salvation, as well as ours, depends upon his merits. But with respect to a saving faith, we must be judged by a different code ; for it is not those who *do not*, but those who *will not* see, that God will punish. Let us remember the admonition of our Lord himself : “ If ye were blind, ye should have no sin, but now ye say *we see*, therefore your sin remaineth¹.”

Upon this plea St. Peter opens the door of penitence to the Jews. He refers them to their ancient prophecies, he shews them their completion in their suffering Saviour. What is the result ? “ Repent ye therefore, he cries, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” *Repent*, by a radical change of mind and affections ; “ make

¹ John ix. 41.

you new hearts and a new spirit ;" nothing less than a *new creation* in your souls can qualify you for your new faith : *be converted*, be turned from your iniquities, *that your sins may be blotted out*. Happy tidings ! *that your sins may be blotted out* ; happier still to be informed by whom this great salvation should be effected. It shall take place "when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord ;" that is, that you may, at the day that God shall give rest to the righteous, escape the vengeance denounced against the rejecting of this offer of salvation, which will be when all the prophecies concerning him are accomplished. *Times of refreshing* undoubtedly mean days of comfort and consolation ; and in the coming of Christ are these comfortable times to be expected. As St. Peter's sermon was addressed solely to the Jews, the deliverance of the Christians at the then future siege of Jerusalem has been understood to be meant by this passage. However that may be, it is applicable to us, when by repentance and contrition we are made fully sensible of *the presence of the Lord*, that Lord now in a state of exaltation, who, we are assured, will come again at the end of the world to judge both the quick and the dead. A reference to the prophecies was a most powerful argument to the Jews. If they enquired, therefore, who that Saviour was, they were ready to be told that it was He of whom Moses predicted ; it was He of whom all the Prophets had spoken, from Samuel who founded the school of the Prophets, and who appears upon re-

cord as being the first after Moses who wrote his own prophecy ; it was He of whom it was said to Abraham, “ In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” And if all the Gentiles, adds St. Peter emphatically, had this promise, how much more may you, *children of these prophets, and of this covenant*, expect him ? “ Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” This is indeed the sum and substance of the Gospel revelation, redemption from sin by Christ, manifested to the Jews, after his resurrection, by the plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit.

This address of Peter was calculated to make a strong impression on the minds of the people. The connection of present circumstances, with prophecies well known to every Jew, left them without reply. How could they doubt, but that God would bestow these blessings on them through the intervention of his Son, when they saw him who had been healed *in his name* stand before them whole ? How could they doubt, but that other blessings would follow those that believe, when such mighty signs and wonders were given as evidences of their truth ? How could they doubt, but that He whose word controled the powers of nature, and restored soundness to the infirm, could, with equal ease, pour forth the abundance of his grace, and heal the inveterate sickness of a disordered soul ?

From a contemplation of what the Jews felt on

this occasion, let us turn our thoughts more seriously on ourselves. These valuable addresses of the primitive Apostles descend to us with every advantage. They are the result of cool reason, tempered by the genial warmth of true religion. They are noble and eloquent effusions, dictated by the supernatural influence of divine wisdom. What more could the ancient Jews desire, what more can *we* desire, to convince us that this, and this only, is *the rock of our salvation and our refuge?*

Here no partiality appears to any age or nation ; no flattery to any man, or ranks of men, to compromise the truth ; the Jew is no longer a chosen person ; the great and magnificent temple no longer a super-eminent place of public worship ; all are made equal before the cross of Christ. As “ all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ¹ ;” so all, through Christ, are made partakers of equal privileges. *God hath sent his Son Jesus, to bless us all, with temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings, by turning away every one of us from our iniquities ; for as there are no exceptions in guilt, so there are none in the offers of salvation.*

¹ Rom. iii. 23.

LECTURE VI.

ACTS IV. 1—31.

Imprisonment and release of Peter and John.—Assembly and Prayer of the Believers, strengthened by the Holy Ghost. Jerusalem, A. D. 33.

THOSE who profess the faith of Christ must learn to suffer for his sake. This was one of the first lessons which our Saviour taught his disciples while he was with them in the world, and this will be one of the last lessons which good Christians, to the latest generations, will find occasion to observe. The Spirit of God and the spirit of the world are at enmity; nor can they ever be reconciled till the latter be subdued by conquest. But in this conflict, what trials do the righteous suffer? Yet in nothing are they dejected, for they are contented, with St. Paul, to “*spend and be spent for Christ*”¹; well-knowing, that he, and he only, “*who shall endure unto the end shall be saved*”².

I have now, my brethren, to introduce to you the first persecution of the Apostles, for preaching the high and important doctrines of their Master.

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 15.

² Matt. xxiv. 13.

An easy reception of these truths they did not expect. They had been forewarned of the opposition they should meet with, and they looked for it as an evidence of their Lord's veracity. "Ye shall be brought before governors and Kings *for my sake*¹." The time too was at no great distance when they should suffer such things. Before the completion of the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, these things should come to pass. "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before Kings and Rulers *for my name's sake* ; and it shall turn to you for a testimony²."

The success which had attended St. Peter's sermon in Solomon's porch, had added very considerably to the number of believers. The conferences probably had continued late ; for it was now even-tide, when the Priests, the Captain of the Temple, and a party of the sect of the Sadducees, took the Apostles into custody. It is easy to imagine, why the Priests and the Sadducees should thus violently oppose them ; and if we understand by the Captain of the Temple, the Captain of the Levites' guard, the eagerness with which they laid hands on them will soon be accounted for. On the great days of the different feasts, the Roman guard from the tower of Antonia, one of the forts of the temple, assisted the ordinary officers in keeping the peace. This was the case at the apprehension of

¹ Matt. x. 18.

² Luke xxi. 12.

our Saviour. “Judas, having received a *band of men*, the Roman guard, *and* officers from the chief Priest and Pharisees, cometh thither¹.” In the one case, the terms are military, in the other, they denote civil officers². The conjunction of these forces, when our Saviour was apprehended, and the violence with which Peter and John were led to prison, brought to their remembrance, on the following day, the prophecy of David in the second Psalm. At this time almost every circumstance had a reference to some ancient prediction; and the Apostles lose no opportunity of calling the attention to these allusions, as the Jews, by these means, were convinced, or convicted out of their own Scriptures.

The Priests and Sadducees were actuated by motives of great inveteracy against the promoters of the religion of Jesus. The Jewish Priests had every thing to fear from the introduction of Christianity. Their long established prejudices were to be removed; the corruptions which had mixed themselves with their forms of worship were to be abolished; their hearts were to be corrected; and the veil to be taken away, which was spread only *to be seen of men*. How ready is unregenerate man to revile and persecute those, whose manners and morals are superior to his own! Difference of opinion, on any subject where human passions are suffered too warmly to interfere, becomes the parent of persecution; and this conduct is more or

¹ John xviii. 3.

² Υπηρεται, subministri.

less blameable, according to the greater or less degree of animosity to which it is carried. In ordinary transactions, we have often too much reason to lament the prevalence of this principle; and when it has been connected with more important subjects, it becomes a prelude to more calamitous conclusions.

Another powerful faction joined the confederacy against the disciples of Jesus Christ. The Sadducees were at that time a prevailing sect among the Jews. If we enquire the reason why they were roused with indignation, we shall find that it originated in the same difference of opinion, which on too many occasions has set the father against the son, and the son against the father; which has disunited close-compacted friendships, and even convulsed kingdoms. The Sadducees were the sceptics of the age, and rejected the belief of the existence of the soul after death, and the rewards and punishments of an invisible world. They are represented as harsh and morose in their conduct, exacting severe recompence, and punishing the promoters of tumults, as enemies to that worldly quiet, to which all their hopes of happiness were confined. No wonder then that they were "grieved that the Apostles taught the people, and preached, through Jesus, the resurrection of the dead."

Do we not see, in these principles, a striking characteristic of that infidelity, which, in every age, as well as the present, has produced the most fatal consequences? If the language of such pro-

fessors be, that *Death is an eternal sleep*, it is natural to suppose, that the actions of their lives will be directed with reference to this conclusion. If the Sadducees held the opinion that the soul perishes with the body, which, we are assured, was their belief, shall we be surprised to find them persecuting, even unto death, those holy men who endeavoured to reclaim the world from so dangerous a delusion ?

Another popular sect, of very opposite principles, but not more remarkable for purity of practice, was, at that time, also prevalent in Jerusalem. This was distinguished by the name of *Pharisees*, from an Hebrew word, which signifies *separated*, or *set apart*, because they pretended to a superior degree of holiness, whilst, in reality, they were, as our Lord himself describes them, “outwardly appearing righteous unto men, but within full of hypocrisy and iniquity¹.”

These two sects are frequently mentioned by the historian of the Jews, and so far confirm the historical parts of the New Testament, as the same character and conduct are attributed to them in both. It is consistent therefore to imagine, that they had a considerable influence in inflaming the public mind against our Lord, his Apostles, and the primitive Christians. Whilst our Saviour lived, the Pharisees, for obvious reasons, were his most strenuous opposers. After his decease, the Sadducees were most active against his followers ; for,

¹ Matt. xxiii. 28.

if they succeeded in establishing the important doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, as an obvious inference from the resurrection of Christ, their avowed principles must be considered as refuted, and their inveterate adversaries left masters of the field.

The character of the Sadducees, then, sufficiently accounts for their alarm at the large concourse of St. Peter's hearers, and at the great accession to the number of believers. The setting sun, which had witnessed such a blessed change in the hearts of the multitude, saw the holy Preachers (for St. John doubtless took his part in instructing the people) rudely apprehended, and left to spend the night in the solitude of a prison.

How different the feelings of a pious sufferer in such a situation, from those of him whose wounded conscience is also *bound in misery and iron!* As there is no captivity more grievous than the captivity of sin, so there is no freedom more joyful than that which is procured for us by the Captain of our salvation; for "if Christ set us free, then are we free indeed¹!"

The next morning, the great Council, or Sanhedrim of the Jews assembled, and the prisoners were brought before them. Here we find some names familiar to us by the part they took in the conviction of the blessed Jesus: *Annas, the High Priest, and Caiaphas*; the latter in fact was the principal in office, but his father-in-law, Annas, possessed the

¹ John viii. 36.

authority. This also is consistent with history, for in the declining days of the Jewish government, the title of High Priest was attributed to several who had enjoyed that dignity in succession. What must have been the expectation of Peter and John before such a tribunal? Inflamed, doubtless, with zeal at treading in their Master's steps, they are strengthened by the recollection that he had foretold this very situation. "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service¹." "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them²."

The prisoners being interrogated concerning the restoration of the lame man, answer with the boldness of those who have confidence in their cause, and whose cause is supported by supernatural direction. The peculiar assistance of the Spirit attends St. Peter's words, and he publicly avows that holy name by which the poor beggar, so lately bowed down with infirmity, was enabled now to present himself before them, in the erect posture of health and stability. Though they were convinced that the same court, which had condemned their Master, might extend its oppressive power to them, yet this consideration had no influence over their conduct. The moment called for freedom of speech, and they used it ac-

¹ John xvi. 2.

² Ib. v. 4.

cordingly. They boldly proved from the Jewish Scriptures, (those writings which every member of the Sanhedrim professed to believe) that Jesus Christ was the expected Saviour, and therefore that those who condemned him were his murderers.—“ This Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, who is since risen from the dead, and in whose name this man stands here before you whole, even He is the stone, mentioned by David, whom ye acknowledge as a prophet, which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.” The application of this text frequently occurs ; and not one more important offers itself to our consideration. For, as St. Peter concludes his short address, “ there is salvation in no other; there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved :” none other name ! neither patriarch, nor prophet, nor priest, nor king : no ruler nor governor, as ye well know, whose name could accomplish such a miracle as this, much less could effect a still greater miracle than giving health to a distempered body, could procure a spiritual restoration to a sinful and disordered soul.

This was the sum and substance of all the Apostle’s preaching, indeed of all that can be said, or written, on the subject of Christianity. The rejection of Christ by the Jews, and a firm belief in the meritorious cause of his painful and ignominious death, is the foundation of all true religion, for as St. Paul argues, “ Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, even Jesus

Christ ¹." Through him, and him alone, we are justified from all things from which we could not be justified by our own works, or by the works of the law, taking the expression in any sense; through him we are sanctified; through him we have access to the Father; and through him we shall inherit the promise of everlasting life. "Behold! I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded ²."

Looking on this allusion with all the fulness which it implies, the good Christian can have no doubt on whom he ought to rely for the confirmation of all his hopes, for "Christ is able to save *to the uttermost* them that come unto God by him ³." How complete is this assurance! and how consolatory to the sinner! It brings us all within the pale of salvation, and points out to us the road. "I am the way," said our Saviour, "and the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me ⁴." The Apostles, as we see here, held the same language, which can never be too frequently repeated, nor too attentively considered. "There is salvation in no other; there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

But, it may be inquired, *how* are we strengthened by the *name* of Christ? By the imputation of his merits. "He saved us while we were yet sin-

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

² Heb. vii. 25.

³ 1 Pet. ii. 6.

⁴ John xiv. 6.

ners¹.” “Of his own will begat he us by the word of his power².” But “shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!” For, as the Apostle says, “How shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein³?” Though we are freely justified by the merits of Christ, we are not, if I may so say, to continue *indolently holy*; we are to go on to greater degrees of perfection; we must *grow in grace*, and in all holiness of living, if we would reap the benefits of our Saviour’s merits. The case of human salvation is thus clearly stated by the Apostle: “After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” And then, lest any one should make an improper use of this doctrine, he adds, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works⁴.”

The freedom of speech, now used by the Apostles, made a sensible impression on the minds of the Council; but they were not willing to inflict a punishment on those, whom, though they knew to

¹ Rom. v. 8.

³ Rom. vi. 1.

² James i. 18.

⁴ Tit. iii. 4—8.

have been followers of Jesus, they perceived to be men of not much consequence in Jerusalem, *unlearned and ignorant men*, that is, men not precisely *vulgar* and *illiterate*, as we use the words, but not skilled, like the Scribes and Rabbins, in the profound knowledge of the law, and of no rank or public estimation. They therefore, after a private consultation, determined merely to threaten them, and to let them go. "They called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach, in the name of Jesus;" neither privately nor publicly to promulgate their doctrines. But what was the bold answer of the two Apostles? "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we *cannot but* speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Let not this sentence be assumed by those who desire an apology for resistance to their legal governors. Peter and John were *inspired* Apostles. Their mandate was immediately from Heaven. No human fancy, no imaginary commission, can justify an opposition to legally constituted authorities. But should even those authorities command what is contrary to the law of God, though in few instances such a situation may be expected to occur, the answer of Peter and John, on this occasion, may allowably be given. Let it however be observed, that though the Apostles assented not to the injunction of the Sanhedrim, they submitted, as we shall soon find, to an unmerited correction.

It is a dangerous imagination, that every oppo-

sition of the civil powers to the private opinion of individuals, is to be considered as a species of persecution. When a man endeavours to do right, in a right manner, and is unreasonably obstructed, he may justly call it by that name; but if he sets up his own sentiments against those of the ruling powers, and uses means, unjustifiably or illegally, to support them, let him not assume the *merit* (for so he thinks it) of persecution. No profession of religion ever secured the rights of civil authority more effectually than the religion of Christ. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates¹." Why? *For the Lord's sake.* And *for the sake of the same Lord*, the good Christian will resist, even unto death, if he be called upon to sacrifice his religion, or his conscience, by the arbitrary injunction of any human power. Our obligations to God are supreme. They absorb, or supersede, all others. No temptation, therefore, no solicitation, no threatening, should draw us, under any pretences, to a transgression of our duty. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God²?" said the youthful Patriarch. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye;" said the indignant Apostles. In both cases, let us profit by the examples; for, "if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?"

The prisoners being dismissed, not so much from the good-will of the Sanhedrim, as from fear of the

¹ Tit. iii. 1.

² Gen. xxxix. 9.

people, repaired to the assembly of the faithful, and engaged with them in that duty, most congenial to an afflicted soul, because most likely to procure consolation, the acceptable duty of prayer. "They lifted up their voices to God *with one accord*." Some have imagined that they used, on this occasion, a pre-conceived form of worship. The prayer was undoubtedly most applicable to the situation of the Church at that period, and might be known to every person present. It refers, as all the first addresses of the Apostles do, to the word of prophecy; and attributes to Christ the expression of David in the second Psalm: "Why do the Heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The Kings of the earth set themselves (as it were in military array) and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed¹." Such was the conspiracy of Herod and Pontius Pilate against our Saviour; such was the present confederacy of the Priests, the Scribes, and the Sadducees, against his immediate followers; such is the union of the wicked man and the infidel, which even at this day disturbs the peace and sanctity of the Christian Church. "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," is the language of all. But what is the answer from the sure oracle of Heaven? "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision²." The believers in Christ will finally be

¹ Psalm ii. 1, 2.

² Ibid. ii. 3, 4.

triumphant. In the mean time, they must bow before the throne of grace with perfect resignation, and using the humble expression of the Apostles, exclaim, "Behold ! their threatenings !"

But against whom was this union of discordant interests employed ? "Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus;" so called from the same Psalm ; "*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee—* against *him* were they gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." In the depth of Divine Wisdom it was resolved, that Christ should suffer for the sins of the people ; he did not decree that the Jews should perpetrate the act, but permitted them to do, what he saw they would do if they were permitted¹. All must necessarily be obscure to man, whose faculties are of a very limited nature, when he contemplates the foreknowledge of God, and attempts to reconcile that divine attribute with the free-will of his creatures. The attributes of God are all above our comprehension ; but of this we may be certain, that God always wills what is best for us ; and when we obey him not, we *resist that grace, we quench that Holy Spirit*, which he designs to be effectual to our eternal salvation.

The Apostles conclude their prayer with an earnest request, that *with all boldness they may speak the word*, that God would give evidence of his concurrence by *stretching forth his hand to heal*, and that *signs and wonders* might accompany the name

¹ Hammond in locum.

of Jesus. The former part of this should be the constant petition of every minister of Christ; for who may be presumed to speak the truth with greater boldness, than he whom God hath ordained to “blow the trumpet in Zion¹?” “Howbeit,” says St. Paul, “whereinsoever any is bold, I am bold also².” Difficult though the task be to perform the whole pastoral duty without offence, in the midst of numbers, impatient of interruption, and unaccustomed to reproof, yet where the calls of duty are loud and strong, where a *word spoken in season* may be expected to prevail, the conscientious minister should *boldly* stand forth, like Moses, in the gap; and this, under every pressure of circumstances, “in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst³.” Nothing can excuse the want of the most assiduous attention. “A dispensation of the Gospel,” says the Apostle, “is committed unto me. A *necessity* is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel⁴.” Nor is the obligation confined to one side. The duty is reciprocal; and the flock should come prepared to hear with patience, to receive the word with meekness, and to practise it with unremitting care and diligence. This friendly intercourse between minister and people, is of the greatest consequence to both, and both will one day be called upon for an account of those advantages, which *both* may mutually receive.

¹ Ezra xxxiii. 3.

² 2 Cor. xi. 21.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 27.

⁴ 1 Cor. ix. 16.

While the Apostles were thus offering up their supplications, it pleased God to give a visible and miraculous sign of his approbation. “When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together.” It does not appear in what manner this was effected; probably, as by the same mighty rushing wind, which filled the house where they were sitting on the day of Pentecost. “Except ye see signs and wonders (our Lord once said) ye will not believe¹.” But when we have seen the sign and the wonder, or when the evidence of its truth has been displayed before us, which is the same thing, what answer shall we give, *if we neglect so great a mean of salvation?* “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more and I shake not the earth only, but also heaven².”

The effusion of the Holy Spirit, which immediately followed the supernatural concussion of the house where the Apostles were assembled, gave full and perfect evidence of the divine inspiration;—“they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” New powers of exertion were distributed to the Apostles, adequate to the trying scenes they should be called upon to sustain; they felt an unknown energy take possession of their minds, and “they spake the word of God with boldness.”

¹ John iv. 42.

² Heb. xii. 25, 26.

From this moment the meek and humble followers of Christ assume a new character. Their humility and meekness, indeed, do not desert them, but to these are added other qualities, absolutely necessary for the great and important undertakings to which they are called. The influence of the Holy Spirit, as we shall find in the subsequent history, supported them in circumstances from which the mere fisherman would have shrunk, and to which few, even of better education, and more exalted station, would have been equal. Their minds were raised to their situations; not with that false animation, that thirst after vain glory, which we have often seen in those who have gone forth “conquering and to conquer;” but with that cool intrepidity of conduct, that perfect reliance on an over-ruling director, which nothing but this great effusion of the Spirit could produce.

The gifts of the Spirit on this occasion were extraordinary, because extraordinary were the purposes to which they were to be applied. God always suits his blessings to the exigency of the situation. And there is no doubt but when men, in all ages, are called to extraordinary exertions, they will be assisted by a more than ordinary degree of support. We see not indeed the hand which directs us, we feel not the *house shaken where we are assembled together* to supplicate divine mercies, but the heart of the pious is sensible, that, without the influence of God’s grace, their own endeavours are of no avail.

A presumptuous supposition, however, that we

are the *particular* objects of inspiration, should be carefully guarded against, for the Scripture gives no warrant to such an expectation. This notion has too frequently produced visionaries and enthusiasts in the Church of Christ. But that God's Spirit continues, in the most powerful manner, to influence the hearts of believers, is an invaluable, and most incontrovertible, truth. Let the infidel deride; but the Christian knows it to be true. And every man who has prayed for this direction, who has "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts¹," who has "put off the old man and his deeds, and has put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,"² will experimentally be persuaded, that "the Father hath given us a Comforter, that he may abide with us for ever³."

"O Lord God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy Apostles with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost; leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them alway to thy honour and glory, through Jesus Christ, our Lord⁴. Amen.

¹ Gal. v. 24.

² Ephes. iv. 23, 24.

³ John xiv. 16.

⁴ Collect for St. Barnabas's day.

LECTURE VII.

ACTS IV. 32.—CHAP. V.

Community of goods in the Church—Fraud and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira—Miracles of the Apostles—Their imprisonment and release. Jerusalem, A.D. 33.

THE early history of the Church, as we have already seen, presents before us such a picture of purity and simplicity of manners, as affords a striking reproof, a severe condemnation, of the decaying piety and bold immorality of the modern professors of the same religion. It would hardly be believed, that both were directed by the same sacred law, if the Providence of God had not preserved to us the original records of our faith, and said to us, as well as to them, “ This is the way, walk ye in it ¹.’

If there be one principle, more conducive than another, to public, as well as private, happiness, it is the principle of unity. It is God *who maketh men to be of one mind in an house* ; it is God *who maketh men to be of one mind in a state*, or form of civil government ; it is He who joins them together in their temporal and spiritual affairs ; and when they

¹ Isaiah xxx. 21.

deviate from this divine principle, they are led, not by Him who makes them friends, but by him who would disunite them; and thence arise, both in families, governments, and Established Churches, “confusion and every evil work”¹.

An example of perfect unity appears in the society of the primitive Christians.—“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul!” Can language be more expressive of that blessed harmony in faith, and practice, which then prevailed? As the holy doctrine which they professed was the same, so there was one system of conduct common to them all. But in every age and situation, there will always be something which requires a variation in arrangement, to accommodate it to the general circumstances of the times. This was the case, when the Church of Christ, as yet confined to one city, thought it advisable, for its preservation and advancement, to recommend a community of goods. “Neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.” It does not appear that this determination had respect only to the maintenance and support of the poor, though this doubtless was one great advantage gained by it. It was a general measure; that neither the poor might shrink from suffering on account of poverty, nor the rich from a love of worldly prosperity; but that both, by joining their goods in one common stock, might

¹ James iii. 16.

mutually support each other in the midst of expected persecutions, and particularly in that season, which the prophecy of Christ led them to imagine near at hand, the destruction of the Jewish nation ¹."

Such unanimity of conduct was a convincing argument in their favour; and by these means the Church multiplied greatly. While "the Apostles *with great power* gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, great grace," great respect and reverence, as well as that heavenly grace which passeth all understanding, "was upon them all." Upon whomsoever the abundance of God's grace descends, *great power* will attend his preaching, not indeed the power of working miracles, which is here principally intended, but the power of persuading, the power of delivering the written word with confidence and boldness; and if the other sense be allowed, which seems probable, as in another place it is said, they had "favour with all the people," the approbation of the hearers will attend his well-meant endeavours; an happy circumstance, as evincing *their* benefit and *his* success;

¹ The learned Joseph Mede says.—"They were Jews, and Jews only, that sold their possessions, &c. The Gentiles did not follow the example when the Gospel came amongst them; neither did St. Paul recommend it. This explains the motive for their present conduct. Those who believed in Christ, believed also in the expected destruction of their own nation within a short period; they therefore adopted this method of turning their worldly goods to the greatest spiritual advantage."—Mede's Disc. 28.

for *Paul may plant*, and *Apollos water*, but both will be in vain without God, who *giveth the increase*¹.

Among the principal believers, the custom became general of relinquishing all kinds of private property for the public benefit²; not only that the poor members might be supplied with necessities, but that the rich themselves might receive great stability by their union with, and dependence upon, one another. “Neither was there any of them that lacked,” for they made this voluntary surrender of their possessions, that “distribution might be made to *every man* according as he had need.” A particular instance is given us in the person of Barnabas, a man of amiable and excellent manners, a *son of consolation*, as he is emphatically called, a native of the island of Cyprus, of the tribe of Levi, then resident in Jerusalem. The produce of his estates, which no doubt were very considerable, as he is selected as a contrast to another less amiable character, this man voluntarily brought, and offered to take his share in the general distribution. Not so another disciple, equally noted for his wealth, but not for his liberality. “Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 6.

² “The Jews acted thus, though not by the command, yet doubtless by the approbation, of the Apostles.” Jortin’s Rem. on Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 80.

laid it at the Apostles' feet ;" " intending thereby so to impose upon the Apostles, as to be maintained, like the other disciples, out of the public stock of the Church ; and yet, at the same time, retain a private portion of their estate for themselves ¹." The story of the sudden and deserved punishment of Ananias and Sapphira is interesting and awful. It was a striking, but necessary, act of severity in the primitive Church, to prevent that hypocrisy and deceit, which might have been fatal to its infant interests. The husband, seduced by covetousness, which is the root of all evil, is guilty of the sin of deliberate fraud, which, as is generally the case in the commission of the same sin, he confirms by as deliberate a lie. The punishment succeeds the offence. Immediately on hearing the accusation of St. Peter, he *fell down, and gave up the ghost*. His wife, partaker of the same guilt, falls into the same condemnation. With stronger emphasis she confirms the fraud :—" Tell me," said St. Peter, " whether ye sold the land for so much ; and she said, Yea, for so much." The question, in many a guilty, but more ingenuous, heart, would have produced confession. A moment of reflection, by God's grace, has often saved a soul. But Sapphira's heart was hardened, and she was obliged to hear the dreadful information concerning her husband's latter end, and of the near approach of her own. " Behold ! the feet of

¹ Clarke's Serm. 166.

them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out."

In the account of this transaction, a strong proof appears of the divinity of the Holy Ghost. "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Thus to lie unto the Holy Ghost, and to lie unto God, is to attribute the offence to be committed against the same *person*. That the Holy Ghost, which had so lately visited the Apostles by a visible expression of his power, proceeded from God, and was God, could not but be known to Ananias, is a reflection which greatly aggravates his guilt. At a time when the influence of the Holy Spirit was attended with such, as we may well think, invincible demonstration, at a moment when every arrangement in the Church was directed by his power, how perverse and wicked must have been that heart, which could resist, or attempt to alter, the divine dispensations!

The guilt of this unhappy pair was suggested, as we find in the language of St. Peter, by the father of lies. "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" All sin is of the devil. Being forewarned of this, it is our duty to resist this enemy of souls, whom the Scripture represents as "*walking about seeking whom he may devour*¹." This resistance is a trial of our faith; and we shall be sure to conquer, if we use in our defence the

¹ 1 Pet. v. 8.

spiritual weapons which the Gospel puts into our hands. In proportion as we *grow in grace*, we recede from wilful and deliberate sin ; but if we neither pray for an advance in goodness, nor trust in this contest to the Captain of our Salvation, who can, and will, strengthen us by his Spirit, we leave ourselves open to the assaults of the devil, and *are taken captive by him at his will*¹. This compliance with an unjust desire was the first step of Ananias' and Sapphira's wickedness ; and will always be the first with ours. Let us guard against it with never-ceasing care ; for the next remove will be into inevitable destruction and perdition.

Some commentators have imagined the sin of Ananias to consist in an unaccomplished *vow*. But nothing of this appears in the exact language of St. Peter :—" While it remained (as an original possession) was it not thine own ? And after it was sold, was not the price of it still in thine own power ?" It was not incumbent upon him to alienate the smallest part of his property. But when he engaged to put all he possessed into the common treasury of the society, to receive again his subsistence from the same stock, in proportion to what he placed in it, to be maintained at the expence of the community, whilst he reserved a part for his own private use, this was surely a deliberate fraud, and met with a deserved punishment.

As fraud is a sin which most easily besets the children of men, I subjoin the strong reasoning of

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

a learned divine on this particular case. “ *Deliberate or contrived fraud* is in *itself* a crime of the deepest malignity, and of the most pernicious consequences : a sin which tends to destroy all human society, all trust and confidence among men, all justice and equity, which is the support of the world, and without which no society of mankind can subsist. And the breaking through this obligation by deliberate fraud, is, of all other sins, one of the most open defiances of conscience, and the most wilful opposition to right reason, that can be imagined ; a sin for which a man can find no excuse, nor extenuation in his own mind ; into the commission of which he can be led by no error, by no wrong judgment, by no mistaken opinion whatsoever ; but he must of necessity, at least for that time, have abandoned all true sense of religion ; and depend entirely on the facts not being discovered for the concealment of his shame. Then, for a *Christian* ; a man that professes a pure, and more holy religion ; a religion that commands not only common justice and equity, but singular love and good-will towards our neighbour ; and requires not only abstinence from the unjust things of the world, but also a contempt and indifference even for its innocent enjoyments ; for a man who professes *such a religion*, to be guilty of a contrived and deliberate fraud, which the conscience even of a good *heathen* would abhor ; this is a *greater* aggravation of the crime. Further yet ; to defraud *that* stock, which was intended principally for the support and maintenance of the *poor*, in a time of

great trouble and persecution ; this was an additional increase of his guilt. And it is no inconsiderable circumstance, that this was done at a time when the whole Church were of *one heart and of one mind*, with the utmost simplicity and sincerity of manners ; when there were no ill examples to corrupt or seduce the man, but every one contributed with the *utmost cheerfulness* to the support of their brethren ; and with all readiness put all that they had into the hands of the Apostles. Beyond all this, it is observable that Ananias, excepting the covetous disposition of his *own* mind, had no *necessity*, no *occasion*, no *temptation*, put upon him *from without*, to drive him into the projecting of such a deceit. For this selling of their estates, and laying of them at the Apostles' feet, was not a matter of *compulsion*, but of *free choice* ; not a duty required of them of necessity, and by constraint, but an instance of voluntary liberality, and of the most public-spirited charity. From these circumstances, therefore, we cannot but conclude, that Ananias was wholly without excuse, and that this transaction was from the beginning, originally, and in its whole progress, a deliberately projected, wilful, and continued fraud¹." Under these circumstances, this first instance of transgression recorded in the annals of the Christian Church, as a warning to the early believers, as well as to every succeeding generation, was punished with an unusual degree of temporal severity.

¹ See Dr. S. Clarke's 166th Sermon.

But though the exercise of a severe discipline be sometimes thought necessary in the Church of Christ, as in all other associations of men, for wild passions and uncontrouled inclinations will break out in the human heart, subject as it is continually to the corruption of sin, yet much more pleasing, and often much more beneficial, is it, to draw the transgressor to his duty by the tender and endearing motives of kindness and affection. This conduct was now adopted by the Apostles, as a contrast to the dreadful examples which had been so lately made. Their celebrity increased amongst the people; but a certain awe kept some at a distance, those probably whose hearts were not open to the impression of such charity, or who would have followed Ananias and Sapphira in the covetousness of their dispositions, and have received the benefit, but not contributed to the maintenance, of the the public stock. But true believers acted upon different principles; “there were the more added to the Church, multitudes both of men and women;” the more select this holy society became, the more earnestly did the truly pious desire to join it. And this will ever be the case; for where can the weary head repose with greater security, or surer hopes of quiet, than on that bosom which is prepared to receive it? It is not the largeness of the numbers, but the *excellency* of any society, which recommends it to public notice. “Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be who find it¹.” But though diffi-

¹ Matt. vii. 14.

culties will arise in working out our salvation, it is satisfactory to know, that every man who contends for this victory, will obtain the prize through the means of *Him* whose death and merits plead strongly for him at the throne of his Almighty Father. “I can do all things (says St. Paul) through Christ that strengtheneth me¹;” and the same powerful assistance which animated the Apostle, we are assured, will comfort and support us, if we seek that support by the only means through which it can be obtained, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

The benevolent acts of the Apostles began now to be diffused with an unusual liberality. The external evidence of their power was intended to draw around them from every quarter, those on whom the internal evidence of faith should be more strongly impressed. The “sick were brought forth into the streets, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.” With respect to this species of miracles, a *touch* could have no more influence in the restoration of a sick man, than the influence of a shadow. *However* the means were applied, they were still but *outward* signs, and could have no effect without the supernatural intervention of a Supreme Being. It has been thought that our Saviour’s promise, that his disciples should do *greater works than he*, refers to this, and similar instances of healing at a distance. But, for the reason just mentioned, this

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

appears not to be the case. Their works might be called greater, from the greater circulation of their personal assistance, and the plentiful effusion of the gifts of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; *because I go unto my Father* ¹.” My time in this world is almost accomplished; when it shall be fully completed, your exertions will only then begin; for it will be your duty to “ go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature ².”

It should be remarked on this passage, that some have imagined, that though the sick were brought that they might be healed by the *shadow of Peter*, no particular instance is recorded, and possibly no miracle of this nature performed; as the *expectation* of this method of cure *in the sick* is no proof of their restoration. But the word *also*, in the next sentence, connects these miracles with those that follow: “ there came *also* a multitude, &c. and *they were healed every one.*”

The fame of the Apostles already extended beyond the gates of Jerusalem. The diseased and demoniacs were brought to them out of the neighbouring cities, and every one returned home with the blessing of a perfect cure. It is to be presumed, also, that the removal of their bodily diseases became the cause of the removal of their spiritual distempers; those distempers occasioned

¹ John xiv. 12.

² Mark xvi. 15.

by the corruption of sin. Our Saviour's gracious words on such occasions were, "Sin no more¹:" his disciples' admonition would be the same; and when we, my brethren, are relieved from the oppression of sickness, or healed of any bodily disease or infirmity, let us not forget the moral end of our suffering, nor the true use of our restoration to health; let us *sin no more, lest a worse thing, a severer punishment of sin, come unto us.*

How greatly must these miracles of the Apostles have contributed to the first propagation of the Gospel! And how surely must they have given the impression that their mission was divine! For the same might be said to them which, on a similar occasion, was said to our Lord:—"No man can do those miracles which thou doest, except God be with him²." This conduct must have raised the plain fishermen of Galilee to a considerable elevation in the minds of the people: it must have shewn them that every rank of life was open to true greatness of spirit; that God was no respecter of persons; that the benefits of the religion of Christ were universally distributed; and that "faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God³."

In the midst of these transactions, the Apostles were again called to give more ample testimony to the truth. The members of the Sanhedrim were once more alarmed at the progress of this new sect: they were more, *they were filled with indigna-*

¹ John v. 14:² Ibid. iii. 2.³ 1 Cor. ii. 5.

tion, as the Apostles preached a doctrine so totally inconsistent with the profession of the Sadducees ; and once more the hand of power lodged them in the common prison. But every event in the primitive history of the Church abounds with wonderful attestations of the divine protection. An angel of the Lord opens the prison doors, and sets them free, with a particular injunction to repair again to the Temple, the place of resort for their followers, as well as for a great concourse of persons of all descriptions, and to speak to the assembled multitude *all the words of this life*, that is, the life of glory to which they were called to bear witness ; this life of glory, in opposition to the opinions of the Sadducees, or any other infidels ; this life of glory, assured to the world by Him who is indeed *the resurrection and the life*.

Set at liberty by this power, and obedient to this command, “ they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.” “ How unsuccessful are the projects of the wisest statesmen, when God frowns upon them ! How little do any counsels against Heaven prosper ! In vain is it to shut the doors where God is resolved to open them ; the firmest bars, the strongest chains, cannot hold, where once God has designed and decreed our liberty ¹. ”

When the Jewish magistrates assembled in the morning in still greater numbers than before, for there were present not only the High Priest, and

¹ Cave's Life of St. Peter.

his party, and the members of the great council, but "all the Senate of the children of Israel," judges or counsellors, probably from the other courts, their numbers expressing the opinion they held of the magnitude of the offence, they ordered the prisoners to be brought before them. Great must have been their surprize and consternation, when the officers informed them that they had found the prison closely shut and guarded, and yet that the prisoners were not there. This examination of the officers affords a strong proof of the authenticity of the narrative, and the truth of the event. For the same reason were the Roman guards placed at the sepulchre of Christ. On this occasion the Council saw no reason to accuse, neither *did* they accuse, the keepers, who watched before the door, of negligence. An unknown fear began to occupy their minds; "they doubted of them whereunto this would grow." A messenger soon relieved them, by acquainting them that the prisoners were at large, and, as usual, teaching the people in the accustomed place. On this intelligence they were soon apprehended; but as the prisoners were now favourites of the people, they treated them in public with greater mildness; they brought them, *without violence*, unfettered, and with deceitful lenity, "for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." The High Priest accuses them of disobedience to the injunctions of the magistrates, as well as of intending, by direct charge, to bring the blood of Jesus upon them. Happy would it have been for them, if

they could have repelled the accusation by acquitting their consciences! Happy would it be for *us*, if we could assure ourselves that our sins did not contribute to their offence! For whenever we offend (and *we offend all*) “we crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him (*once more*) to an open shame¹.” Let us then check the first emotions of iniquity, that the blood of Jesus fall not on *us* in vengeance, as on the crucifiers of the Lord of life; yet let us remember, that unless the blood of Christ, in another sense, touch our hearts, our offences, like those of the Jewish Sanhedrim, would be without an expiation. The answer of St. Peter was worthy of his character. He justified their disobedience, as owing allegiance to a superior power. He asserted the restoration to life of Him, whom, he boldly affirms, they had cruelly put to death; but whose present situation was highly exalted, and whose office was to “give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.” This important doctrine, which was to be universally diffused, he asserted, was fully confirmed in his own person, and in those of the other Apostles then present, who were true witnesses of these facts, strengthened and supported by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

This bold language of St. Peter excited such prejudiced and intemperate judgments in the council, as unwelcome truths are apt to produce. Nothing but their deaths can expiate their fault. But

¹ Heb. vi. 6.

discretion made its appearance in the person of Gamaliel, a Rabbi of great reputation ; a Pharisee, and of course in opposition to the infidel principles of the Sadducees, and less severe in the execution of public justice. The mention of the name and character of Gamaliel accords with the history of the times ; and continues to confirm our opinion that we are perusing a true history. There were several of the name, but one is particularly marked, who must be the person here intended ¹. This senator privately counselled the Sanhedrim to be cautious in the punishment of these offenders, and leave their cause to God. Other factions, which he enumerates, had arisen and miscarried. This would do the same, if God did not support it ; and if he did, their opposition would not overthrow it. This is a strong argument in favour of lenity, and should be written in letters of gold, to meet the eye of him who meditates persecution. Gamaliel did not mean that tumult and misrule should

¹ " We are informed by the Jewish Talmuds, that Gamaliel, the son of Simeon, and grandson of Hillel, was president of the council ; that he was a Pharisee ; that he was so well skilled in the law, that he was the second who obtained the name of Rabban, a title of the highest eminency and note of any among their doctors ; and concerning him is this saying, ' From the time that Rabban Gamaliel the Old died, the honour of the law failed, and purity and Pharisaism died.' He died eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem, (A.D. 52.) eighteen years after the convention of this council." Briscoe on the Acts, p. 77.

go unpunished, or that false and pernicious principles, publicly inculcated, should remain unfuted; for the followers both of Theudas and Judas of Galilee, he tells them, were dispersed by the hand of power. But he justly thought that a wanton use of authority, when milder measures would be even more effectual to accomplish the purpose, was contrary to the spirit of humanity, as well as of religion.

The same principle is always desirable and equally beneficial in private life. "A soft answer turneth away wrath ¹." Let us go one step further. How did Christ acquit himself? "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously ²."

The calm opinion of Gamaliel prevailed so far in the council, as to save the lives of the Apostles at this time, but not totally to exempt them from correction. "When they had beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." This first taste of persecution afforded a kind of triumph to these primitive disciples of Christ, who rejoiced that they were *counted worthy* to tread in the steps of so blessed a master. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth ³." If we did but *understand* this short sentence, like the Apostles, we should rejoice for the blessing of afflictions. Whatever those afflic-

¹ Prov. xv. 1.

² 1 Pet. ii. 23.

³ Heb. xii. 6.

tions are, they are the trial of our faith and patience ; and we are assured, that it is only *through faith and patience that we can inherit the promises* ¹." The Apostles indeed had nobler scenes in view. They knew that, the extension of the kingdom of Christ was the consequence of their sufferings. No stripes, therefore, no threatenings, no ill usage of any kind, could deter them from their duty. They continued the practice which they had so happily begun, and " daily in the temple, and from house to house, they ceased not to teach, and to preach, Jesus Christ ;" *in the temple*, in the porches and avenues of the temple, where so many might be assembled ; and *from house to house*, or, as some imagine, at *the house*, the upper room, the original place of meeting ; that is to say, both publicly and privately, they exercised their heavenly calling. They lost no opportunity of promoting their Master's interest. Their eloquence spread itself over the large attentive audience, as well as by private conference in those solitary and retired dwellings where misfortune shuns the day, and where vice and wickedness are compelled to hide their head. We see here how far the pastoral duty should extend. It is an awful charge ; and calls for energy in every word and work. Let it not then be lightly esteemed by those who are the objects of its care. Imperfections equally attend those who teach, and those who are taught ; but

¹ Heb. vi. 12.

when a true zeal for the honour of God, and the interests of religion, animates both, we may look forward with confidence to all the advantages of mutual edification.

This will be more evident, if we inquire, What rendered the labours of the Apostles so successful? It was, the *subject* of their preaching. "They ceased not to teach and to preach *Jesus Christ*." This was the beginning, and the end, of all their teaching; the foundation and the superstructure. It must be ours also, if we would imitate their success. The Christian religion consists not of detached principles of moral conduct, to be gathered from crude systems of philosophy, but forms one *whole* and perfect structure, arising from one sound and sure foundation. It is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit¹."

Thus have I, my brethren, by the blessing of God, brought to a conclusion the first section of these lectures. May the contemplation of this holy book tend to our mutual edification! On a future occasion, I trust, we shall be enabled to pursue these studies; and, in the mean time, let us so frequently meditate on the word of life thus

¹ Ephes. ii. 20. 22.

presented to us, that our faith may be more firmly established; and the fruits of faith continue to shew themselves in our conduct and behaviour, in all godliness and holiness of living, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

END OF SECTION THE FIRST.

SECTION II.

LECTURE VIII.

ACTS VI. VII.

Appointment of the order of Deacons—Accusation, defence, and martyrdom of Stephen. Jerusalem, A.D. 33.

How pleasing to the mind of man, how consolatory to the best interests of his nature, is the prospect of the tranquillity and increasing prosperity of the Church of Christ, which we beheld at the latter end of the last chapter, and which presents itself again to us at the opening of the present! I trust, my brethren, that since we last met at this Evening Lecture, most of you have trod over again the steps which we passed together. May God give us his grace to profit by the holy narrative! And let us remember, that to fix more firmly in our minds the varying scenes of this history, scenes which afford the most lively interest, as representing the characters and conduct of the first founders of our faith, we must not be contented with *one* perusal: we must observe the chain by which one

great event is connected with another, and trace it through every link, till it is lost in the unapproachable throne of God.

The late establishment of an universal hospitality among the followers of Christ, by which the poor were liberally supported, and the rich laid aside their distinctions for the general benefit of the Church, began, from the increase of numbers, to be attended with difficulties. The duty of the Apostles was multiplied to a very great degree; as it extended not only to the instruction of individuals, but to the ministration of such secular affairs as belonged to the community. Negligence in no shape, consistent with possibility, will be attributed to those whose motives are so pure and spotless. But as malignant passions will mix themselves with the most spiritual engagements, we find, even in these early days of the Church, that “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.” Alas! that party prejudices should ever find a refuge among the disciples of so holy a religion! that they should too frequently fix a cruel wound, even in the breast of purity itself! But these are trials of our faith; and when we find within us one drop of such an anti-christian spirit, we should wring it from our hearts.

The opposition here appears to have been between the Grecians, or rather Hellenists, and the Hebrews; by the former, are to be understood those Jews that were dispersed among the Grecians,

and used the Greek version of the prophets; by the latter, those who spoke the language, and of course used the versions, then prevalent in Judea. This contest, though arising from jealousy or discontent, we have reason to believe was of an amicable nature, and in its consequences beneficial to the Church, as from it arose a new and useful order of ministers, who took their name from the office to which they were originally appointed. Their ordination was solemn and impressive, and proceeded immediately, by prayer and imposition of hands, from those to whom had been entrusted *the oracles of God*. *The Twelve* called the multitude together; they convened the body of believers, who might, after diligent enquiry, select seven men of exemplary conduct, and already in possession of spiritual gifts and graces, to be presented to the Apostles, and ordained to this duty. “Look *ye* out seven men of honest report, whom *we* may appoint over this business¹.” “It is not reasonable, they said, that we should leave the word of God, neglect the first duties of Apostles, that of administering the true food which cometh down from heaven, and *serve tables*², which may be equally well performed by other assistants. Our

¹ There is nothing in this text which favours lay-ordination. Though the choice of these seven was committed to the Laity, yet this was done by the particular appointment of the Apostles themselves, who specify the number and the qualifications of the persons fit to be chosen, and who reserve to themselves their designation to this office by the imposition of their hands.

² See Lect. II. p. 7.

proper business is, to give ourselves “*continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*” If the regularly ordained teachers in the Church of Christ conceive themselves to be successors of the Apostles, with what awe should they receive this short abstract of the duties of a minister of the gospel! And how diligently ought those entrusted to their care, to be prepared to second their well-meant endeavours. If they say “How shall we hear without a preacher¹?” when a preacher *is sent*—and we see too in this passage *how* he is sent—what answer will they give, if they do *not* hear? And in what manner shall we, who are “ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God²,” acquit ourselves, if we basely prostitute the gracious communication of Heaven, and neglect to “stir up the gift of God which is in us³.”

The government of the Christian Church at this period consisted of the twelve Apostles, the seventy Disciples, and the seven Deacons⁴.” The Apostles were superior to the Disciples, as from this body we have seen one, selected by themselves, in the place of Judas; the Deacons were inferior to both, as they were chosen from the *multitude of believers*; and though their office consisted, in the first instance, in their attendance on the poor, and in serving at the public tables, it was also extended to assisting the superior minister in the administration of the Lord’s Supper, and in the feasts of charity⁵;

¹ Rom. ix. 14.

² 1 Cor. iv. 1.

³ 2 Tim. i. 6.

⁴ See Jones’s Essay on the Church.

⁵ See Cave’s Life of St. Stephen.

and indeed, in a short time, (as in the case of Philip) to preaching and baptizing. The office of a Deacon was obviously enlarged for the greater benefit of the Church; as we find one of the earliest Ecclesiastical Writers, who in his Epistles more than once enumerates the orders of the priesthood, saying, that “it behoves also the Deacons, who are ministers of the mysteries of Christ, to endeavour that they give no offence in any thing; for, he adds, they are ministers not of meats and drinks only, (alluding to their original appointment) but of the Church of God ¹.”

The office of a Deacon is undoubtedly a most useful and important introduction to the superior orders of the Christian Church. It affords an opportunity of trying the conduct of a candidate for the ministry, before he be admitted to a station, where his negligence, or misbehaviour, might impede those benefits to be derived from a pure practice of the Christian duties.

To enlarge, in this place, on the duties of the ministers of the Gospel, would be an unnecessary interruption before this audience. But I may be allowed to say, that as it is the duty of the Deacon to assist the Priest in imparting the blessing of instruction, particularly to the young, and in *searching out* the sick and needy, and *making their cases known* to their superiors in the ministry ², so may each of you, my brethren, become active members of a

¹ Ignatii Ep. ad Trallesios.

² Office of Ordination of Deacons.

Christian congregation, not by assuming the right of public teaching, which the Church, in all ages, has, for wise reasons, assigned to a particular order of men, but by the private admonitions which each of you may bestow on those entrusted by Providence to your care. You may also work together with us in promoting charitable institutions, in smoothing the pillow of declining age, in relieving the distressed, in binding up the wounds of the sick, in comforting the broken in heart, and, on every pressing occasion, pointing, with anxious diligence, to that "fountain, which is opened for sin, and for uncleanness¹." In the early days of Christianity, (and what days were purer than those?) such an amiable solicitude appeared in every member of the Church, and such grateful assistance was given, even to the Apostles themselves. "I commend unto you (says St. Paul to the Church at Rome) Phœbe, our sister, who is a servant (a deaconess) of the Church which is at Cenchrea; for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus²."

As an instance, how accommodating we ought always to be to the tempers and dispositions even of our reprovers, in things not contrary to the laws of God or man, it may be observed, that the new order of Deacons appears to have consisted, for the most part, if not wholly, of those Grecians, or rather Hellenists, who had complained that the

¹ Zech. xiii. 1.

² Rom. xiii. 1. 3.

widows of their societies had been neglected in the distribution of alms. Such a conciliating conduct is a practical proof of the value of the Apostle's precept, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves¹;" that is, let each pay that deference to the good judgment of another, which, from unaffected humility, they might be inclined to distrust in their own situation.

This happy temper and judicious arrangement of the primitive Church, produced the most beneficial effects. "The word of God increased." The dew of heaven fell upon the stubborn soil, and it brought forth abundant fruits. "The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;" and what was more extraordinary, *a great company of the priests*, some of whom perhaps had taken counsel against the Lord, *were obedient to the faith*, submitted to the sacred ordinances of Christianity. Even before our Saviour's crucifixion, several of this description were secret favourers of his doctrines. "Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also, many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue²:" As the evidences of the truth increased, it may be imagined, their faith increased likewise. May this ever be the case with us! May the light of heaven beam still more and more upon our hearts, till we are brought, by the Spirit of divine grace, to the full lustre of a perfect day!

¹ Phil. ii. 3.

² John xii. 42.

In times of difficulty and danger, we often perceive an energy of character, which, in seasons of less peril, is unknown, and unregarded. On such occasions, God calls forth his own ministers, and bestows upon them such talents, as are necessary to accomplish the great purposes of his will. Such was Stephen, one of the new order of Deacons, who is represented as *full of faith and power*, richly adorned with evangelical graces, and such precious gifts of the Spirit, as enabled him to do “great wonders and miracles among the people.” This holy and intrepid character was the first who was called to the high honour of martyrdom; the only one of the first converts of the Church, the manner of whose death is related at large in the sacred Scriptures. The narrative is highly interesting; in many parts it is truly sublime; and, I doubt not, but it has animated many a pious soul in its passage to eternity.

Very eminent talents, or very eminent piety, are apt to provoke the jealousy and indignation of mankind. This was fully illustrated in the history of St. Stephen. There were at this period several synagogues in Jerusalem, to which were attached schools, or colleges, for the instruction and education of young men in the laws; many of these were erected by the Jews, who lived in foreign countries, for the benefit of their children¹. Of these societies, five combined together with the malicious intention of opposing the celebrity which

¹ Cave's Life of St. Stephen.

St. Stephen had obtained by his heavenly doctrines, and miraculous operations. It has been conjectured, from the inveteracy which these societies displayed against him, that he had been one of their members ; and if we have reason to suppose him to have been an Hellenist, it is probable that this was the case. But what are the pointless arguments of the malignant, to the sound foundation of doctrines, supported by uncontrovertible facts ? “ They were not able to resist the wisdom, and the spirit, by which he spake.” This was one of the marks of a true disciple. Our Lord himself had given this consoling promise to his desponding followers, a little before his death, a promise, which they, conscious of their own ignorance, could not but understand :—“ I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist ¹.”

The attack of the Jewish scholars seems to have been part of a premeditated scheme ; and it is probable, that the wisdom of the world would not be wanting to support them. One of the opponents, on this occasion, there is reason to believe, was the eloquent Paul, who here appears, for the first time, before us ; and who is described as consenting to the death of Stephen ; and, at his execution, guarding the cloaths of the witnesses, who, according to the Jewish law, were enjoined to cast the first stone upon the convicted criminal. Tarsus, the native place of Paul, was the metropolis of

¹ Luke xxi. 15.

Cilicia; and the synagogue of Cilicia was one of those which sent forth emissaries to dispute with Stephen. But even Paul's eloquence, in the days of his spiritual ignorance, was not sufficient to secure his conquest. When they found themselves defeated in the contest of argument, their next step was cowardly and cruel; they excite the indignation of the people, and place him in the hands of the ministers of public justice. His conscious innocence would soon have dismissed him from this tribunal, had they not, as in the case of his blessed Master, suborned false witnesses, who accused him of having "spoken blasphemous words against Moses, and against God, against the temple, and the law; and that they had heard him say, that Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, this holy sanctuary, and shall change the customs (the religious rites and ceremonies) which Moses delivered them¹."

We now behold St. Stephen at the bar of the Jewish Sanhedrim; and, if any thing can add to the greatness of his character, it is his appearance here. Though he was hurried thither, probably in

¹ "Now though these were calumniators, and endeavoured to support a charge of disaffection at least, if not of rebellion, against Stephen, it is probable he might have said something which gave occasion to the accusation, as he might, consistently with Christian prophecy, have mentioned the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and the inferiority of the ceremonial to the moral law. For this was one reason why the unbelieving Jews hated the disciples of Christ so implacably, because they did not prophesy good concerning the nation, but evil." Jortin's Rem. on Eccl. Hist. Vol. I. p. 81.

a tumultuous manner, for we are told that they *caught* him, doubtless unaware of their intentions, and *brought him before the council*, yet did his countenance betray no unmanly symptom of fear; it was the honest index of his heart; nay more, (for more appears to be implied in the expression) a certain august, supernatural brightness, illuminated the features of his face. “All that sat in the council saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel.”

Though it may not please God, under similar circumstances of trial, to give an outward expression of approbation to the cause of virtue and religion, yet his inward support is never wanting; a support, which becomes visible by the collected and intrepid conduct of those on whom it is bestowed; for “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God¹.”

See, then, the first Christian Martyr, standing daunted before a prejudiced and corrupted court! Unmoved with fear, unbiassed by passion, he uses no opprobrious or unbecoming language in his defence; yet boldly speaks the unvarnished dictates of his heart. Modest and prepossessing, yet dignified is his address, “*Men, Brethren, Fathers, hearken!*”—Hear his eloquent discourse! Behold the emotions of his audience! first, listening with attention, and acquiescing in his recital of their acknowledged history; afterwards, denying the inference which their history naturally presented;

¹ Rom. viii. 16.

and lastly, when their remorse and their rage could no longer be suppressed, indignantly interrupting his harangue, and “ gnashing upon him with their teeth !”

In reply to the High Priest’s question—“ Are these things so ?” or, as we should say, Do you plead guilty, or not guilty ? he abridges the Mosaic history of the Jews, from the days of Abraham to the building of the temple, and shews that God did not intend to confine his worship to the Jewish nation, nor his presence to the temple ; that from the earliest ages he had promised a Messiah, by whom all men should be saved ; that the ceremonies of the law were not intended to be perpetual, for by the law, no man could be saved on account of transgression. He then applies these things to Jesus of Nazareth, for whom he stood in judgment before them ; and acquaints them that this is He, whom their own Prophets had foretold. His language then rises to a severer reprehension, (which might well be the case before *that* tribunal) and reproaches them that they had not only been the betrayers and the murderers of Him truly called The Just One, but that they had obstinately resisted the influence of the Holy Spirit, which called them to repentance.

After this period, the holy orator was not suffered to proceed. Alas ! how often does conscience stop the word of admonition ! *They cried with a loud voice—they stopped their ears—they ran upon him with one accord.* In this awful moment, how was the prisoner employed ? His eyes and thoughts

were directed to higher, and nobler, objects. "Being full of the Holy Ghost," possessing a double portion of divine support (a blessing which many good men experience in the hour of death) "he looked up stedfastly into heaven," and a resplendent vision was presented to his sight; he "saw the glory of God," the effulgent splendor of the divine presence, "and Jesus," his Master, his Friend, his Saviour, "standing," as if ready to assist him, "at the right hand of God." Unable to restrain his transport, and regardless whether he offended his judges or not, he exclaimed, "Behold! I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." "So easily can heaven delight, and entertain us in the want of all earthly comforts; and divine consolations are then nearest to us, when human assistances are farthest from us ¹!"

This does not appear to have been a popular tumult or insurrection, properly so called, though the sentence of the Sanhedrim (which we have no reason to doubt was pronounced, as all the other transactions were of a legal nature) was evidently carried into execution in a tumultuous manner ².

¹ Cave ut supra.

² Though Pilate, the Roman procurator, ought to have been consulted, if the proceedings were of a legal nature, yet from the character of Pilate, and from the circumstance of his being on very bad terms with the Jews, we may imagine that he did not interfere with them on this occasion, or endeavour to prevent, or punish, the irregularity of their conduct. Some commentators are of opinion, that Stephen was executed without a judicial trial, and legal sentence, after the manner of the zealots.

The executive powers were, in this case, too surely implicated in shedding this righteous blood. The prisoner was conducted *out of the city*, according to the Jewish law, and suffered the Jewish punishment of stoning, the usual punishment for blasphemy. The witnesses too (whose outer garments we find laid at the feet of Saul, lest they should be encumbered in inflicting the punishment) according to the same law, were required to cast the first stone.

Here let us behold the holy martyr kneeling in the midst of his executioners; first recommending his soul to his Saviour and his God, afterwards, in imitation of his blessed Master, praying for his murderers, and then, as the historian elegantly expresses it, "*he fell asleep.*" So soft a pillow is death to a good man, so willingly, so quietly, does he leave the world, as a weary labourer goes to bed at night. What storms or tempests soever may follow him while he lives, his sun, in spite of all the malice and cruelty of his enemies, sets serene and calm; "mark the perfect, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace¹."

I dwell not, in this place, on St. Stephen's character. The interesting narrative of the Evangelist sufficiently displays it. Proper reflections on the sublime piety of this holy sufferer have already presented themselves to your minds. To attempt more particularly to describe them, would be to diminish their effects. We feel the *greatness* of

¹ Psalm xxxvii. 37.

his death, and rest satisfied with the motives. May we enjoy equal confidence when we most want, and most desire, its assistance !

A consideration of St. Stephen's martyrdom, and the several circumstances which attend it, affords a considerable confirmation of our faith. Whatever a good Christian ought to believe, and practise, is clearly manifested, either by his admirable discourse, or his illustrious example. The doctrines of the Gospel were those for which he died. His conception of them was pure and evangelical, and his delivery of them manly and energetic. He describes the nature of the Divine Being as essentially *one*, yet consisting of three persons. "The God of Glory," he says, "appeared unto our father Abraham." He addresses a prayer to the *Son of Man*, (the title which Daniel gives to the Messiah) whom he saw "standing at the right hand of God:" and he reproaches the Jews for "resisting the Holy Ghost." He says, that the Prophets, but particularly Moses, predicted the coming of Messiah, but that the natural depravity of men prevented the benefits to be derived from this important knowledge. "Our fathers *would not obey him*, to whom had been delivered these lively oracles," these words, that would have imparted spiritual life; "but thrust him from them, and *in their hearts* turned back again" to their old idolatries. He insinuates, that the ceremonies of the law had a hidden meaning, and that there was an internal, as well as an external, circumcision; which is truly the case even with the waters of

Christian baptism ; and shews that Jesus was the true Messiah, and that he would receive the souls of the departed. “ Lord Jesus! receive my spirit!” implying, that the soul was altogether different from the body, that while the one was returned to its original dust, the other would survive, and flourish, in the bosom of its Saviour.

We cannot be insensible to the great importance of these doctrines ; and when we find them confirmed by the blood of a martyr, who could have no other motive for his conduct than a conviction of their truth, it is our duty to receive the testimony with reverence, and to obey it with thankfulness.

In the character of St. Stephen, we have an eminent example of *faith* and *charity*. The care which he expressed for his soul in his dying moments, implied the sense he entertained of its importance, and his firm belief of a future state. When surrounded by his murderers, and sensible that his last minute was at hand, he threw aside all attention to the perishing tabernacle of flesh, and commended his soul to Him, who had *himself* died to save it. The words of his Saviour, no doubt, animated his departing spirit—“ Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul¹.” “ And what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul² ?” When every thing is at stake, we do not usually address ourselves to those who cannot save. His

¹ Matt. x. 28.

² Ib. xvi. 26.

faith in Christ therefore was “the anchor of his soul, both sure and certain¹ ;” and his trust in Him could not more emphatically be displayed, than by his prayer to receive his spirit into his presence, and under his protection.

The subject of his last and parting prayer was a practical commentary on his faith. “The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned² .” This pure spirit of charity, of brotherly love, in the highest sense of the expression, manifested itself in St. Stephen, by praying for his murderers, and those concerned in so wicked a transaction :—“Lord ! lay not this sin to their charge.” And his prayer was received ; for St. Paul, at this period one of this description, and who himself probably heard the petition, became, through the divine grace, at no great distance of time, a sincere-penitent, and a zealous convert. St. Paul’s conversion, doubtless, was miraculous ; but the impression made upon his mind by the death of Stephen, must have had considerable influence on the confirmation of his faith. We shall not know till the hour of our death, how great a comfort it will be to our souls, to *forgive our enemies*. But let me warn you, my brethren, if we postpone the performance of this most necessary duty till *that* time, it may be too late. It is as indispensably requisite in every period of our life, that we should shew forth our faith by our works in this particu-

¹ Heb. vi. 19.

² 1 Tim. i. 5.

lar, as in any other positive Christian injunction. We have indeed a still higher example than St. Stephen : “ Father ! forgive them ;” said our Lord himself. And this he did in conformity to his own command : “ But I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them which despitefully use you ¹.”

The prospect of a good man in the agonies of death, and a knowledge of the motives which support him under them, offer to the mind such a subject for reflection and spiritual improvement, as will not be found in any other situation. We have beheld St. Stephen in the awful moment of his departure from the world. Let us now turn our eyes upon ourselves ; and let us reflect that what comforted him under his sufferings, will also strengthen and support us. *Faith in Christ* is that holy principle, to which *alone* we can resort for true consolation. Have we trusted in the world ? The world leaves us. Do we trust in ourselves ? What are we when the decay of age, or premature indisposition, brings us to the borders of the grave ? But if our confidence be placed implicitly, and exclusively, on Him, whose merits and mercies only can be our security in every trying hour, we shall pass safely through the severest bodily pains and temptations, through the grave and gate of death itself ; and shall be assured, that “ if we have been planted together in the likeness of Christ’s death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection ².”

¹ Matt. v. 44.

² Rom. vi. 5.

Look upward, my brethren, from the spot which we now inhabit, to the glorious vision which the holy martyr saw in heaven. It encouraged *him*—may it encourage *us*!—to “run with patience the race which is set before us—looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith¹.” And

“Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the testimony of thy truth, we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first martyr St. Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to Thee, O blessed Jesus! who standest at the right hand of God, to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate².” Amen.

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

² Collect for St. Stephen's day.

LECTURE IX.

ACTS VIII.

Persecution and dispersion of believers—Philip the Deacon plants a Church in Samaria—Simon the Magician—Philip teaches, and baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch—Jerusalem—Sebaste, a city of Samaria—Road from Jerusalem to Gaza—Azotus—Cesarea. A. D. 34.

IF there be any circumstance which particularly displays the supreme majesty of God, and his controuling power over the affairs of men, it is when those events which we ignorantly call *evil*, and which appear to us teeming with destruction, are not only removed, without those accumulated horrors which we dreaded, but actually leave behind them the most beneficial effects. Then are we satisfied that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men¹ ;” then do we gratefully acknowledge, “This is thy hand, and Thou, Lord, hast done it² .”

The persecution of the primitive Church, which immediately succeeded the death of St. Stephen,

¹ Dan. iv. 17.

² Psalm cix. 26.

naturally suggests this reflection. The “little flock,” which could hardly be said to have acquired any worldly stability, might seem unable to sustain the rude shock which the malice of its enemies was preparing to inflict upon it. “Had it indeed been of men, as Gamaliel argued, it would have come to nought ;” but as it was of God, man could not overthrow it.

Having dipped their hands in blood, the Jewish rulers could not easily be appeased ; and “the persecution was great against the Church which was at Jerusalem.” If we inquire, what were the crimes which demanded such severity of punishment ? we shall find that their accusers were instigated, rather by prejudice and inveterate enmity, than even by the common pretext of a judicial offence. It was alleged against the Christians, that they were the propagators of a *new doctrine*, that their intention was to overturn the ancient form of religion, and that they affirmed Jesus of Nazareth to be the true Messiah. To these they added charges of a political nature ; they accused them of stirring up sedition ; and of prophesying, and of course attempting, the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, as well as of the whole Jewish people.

It was not to be suspected, that so humble a society, associated together for peaceful purposes, and which avowed that worldly dominion formed no part of its design, could expect to introduce political changes in the established government ; and surely it could not only be no crime, but de-

serving of the highest commendation, to endeavour to reform the heart by preaching, through Christ, the forgiveness of sins ; supported as it was by “ miracles, and wonders, and signs,” from heaven itself. Yet powerful as these were, they could not restrain the crimson sword of persecution. Many of the believers fell blessed sacrifices to their principles. “ When they were put to death, (said the repenting Paul, alluding to this period) I gave my voice against them.”

The persecution indeed raged with unrelenting violence under the direction of this, afterwards penitent, Apostle. We have seen him a cool spectator, a deliberate conductor, of St. Stephen's death. The history informs us, that *devout men*, the religious converts of Christianity, heedless of giving offence, prepared the body of their deceased friend for interment ; and, as might reasonably be expected where so good a man had perished in so righteous a cause, “ made great lamentation over him.” *As for Saul*, says St. Luke, recurring to him for whom every Christian could not but be anxious, who was afterwards so conspicuous an instrument in the hand of Providence, in propagating the blessings of the Gospel, he was a remorseless and an heavy persecutor. “ *He made havock of the Church.*” How strong the expression ! He ravaged abroad, as a tyger hunting for its prey ; “ entering into every house, and haling men and women ;” separating the parent from the child, distressing the protector and the orphan ; “ com-

mitted them to prison ;” from whence, in too many instances, death alone delivered them.

Such, and so dreadful, are the effects of a blind and desolating zeal. Yet melancholy as such a state of mind may be, which could dictate, or at least could irritate and inflame, such cruel persecutions, from this very example we may learn, that no man should despair. In some unexpected moment we may be convinced of sin, and the grace of God may abound in our conversion. Before we finish this history, indeed before we have proceeded far in it, we shall behold an happy alteration in the heart of St. Paul. We shall discover also the reason of the change. “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord,” says he, “who hath enabled me, putting me into the ministry ; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief ; and the grace of God was exceeding abundant, with faith, and love, which is in Christ Jesus ¹.” Let not any of us, after the example of St. Paul, shelter ourselves in the commission of sin under the pretence of ignorance. We are not ignorant of the way of salvation, and therefore we shall be doubly guilty if we walk not in it. “If ye were blind,” said our Saviour himself, “ye should have no sin ; but now ye say, We see, therefore, your sin remaineth ².”

The effects of this persecution were most salu-

¹ 1 Tim. i. 13, 14.

² John ix. 41.

tary to the Church. Instead of confining the benefits of Christianity to the limits of Jerusalem, where the glorious Author of it, had so lately finished his course upon earth, the believers of this faith are dispersed abroad into various regions, in each of which we shall soon see the establishment of a religious society. But lest this dispersion should be desultory, and unproductive in the great benefits to be derived from it, the Apostles themselves remained behind as a sacred college in Jerusalem, and encountered every impending danger, that the affairs of the Church might be conducted with becoming order and regularity.

From the earliest period of Ecclesiastical History, therefore, we behold an establishment of religious government, suggested, no doubt, by the divine Spirit itself, and tending, in every respect, to the edification of Christian believers. “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints¹.” The Deacons and other holy associates were first sent out to make known the way of salvation. But here let me remark, that in the great business of instruction, every man knew his own office, and every man was zealous to fulfil it. It was the duty of the great body of believers to declare the important cause for which they suffered in this dispersion; and the motives which had induced them, and ought to induce others, to believe in Christ. This is understood by the expression, “They

¹ 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

went every where preaching the word ;” the language is *evangelizing the word*, announcing the word of glad tidings. But this is not all that a regularly commissioned minister of the Gospel was to perform. For Philip, we are told, who was a minister of this description, “ went down to the city of Samaria, and *preached Christ* unto them.” Though the word *preached* occurs in both verses of the translation, it is totally different in the original ; it signifies in the latter case to proclaim as an Herald according to his office. The exact meaning, therefore, is this : the former expression refers to the publishing of the Gospel of Christ by those that have no particular calling to it, as those Jews and Proselytes that were persecuted, and driven out of Jerusalem ; the latter, applies to the preaching of the Gospel by a person ordained to it by the Apostles, which was the case with Philip the Deacon ¹, who also baptized, and performed such other ministerial duties as he was commissioned to perform. That these things were purposely and originally designed for the sake of order, is clear from the subsequent history of the Church ; for we find that no sooner was a Christian society formed in any of the surrounding villages, or even in more distant regions, than one or more of the Apostles visited it as soon as possible, to confirm the disciples in the faith. This very circumstance implies, that the order of Deacons was inferior to that of the Apostles. A confirma-

¹ Hammond’s Com. in locum.

tion of this observation occurs at the very period of Church History which we are now considering; for Peter and John were *sent* (did not go, merely according to their own pleasure, but were delegated from the general council of the Apostles) to the Church planted by Philip in Samaria, that by the imposition of *their* hands and *their* prayers, spiritual pastors might be appointed, and spiritual gifts imparted, which could not have been received from any other quarter. “When Peter and John were come down, they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus) then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

Without entering into controversy with other Churches, established upon other principles, let us rest satisfied with our own, as approaching the nearest of any that we know of, to that founded by the Apostles. Many good men, no doubt, have seen this subject in a different light. We leave them to their own opinions. But it is no trivial matter that we should be well acquainted with the origin of Church-Government; not indeed on account of any outward splendour that may attend it, but for those blessings which are derived from a due gradation of power, and from an increase of spiritual gifts delivered by these means. The Apostle beautifully enumerates those gifts and benefits to be expected from Him, who was the head of this mystical body.—“And he gave some Apostles; and some prophets; and some evan-

gelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;—from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working of the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love ¹.”

The first Christian Church which we behold thus established out of Jerusalem, was in Sebaste, a city of Samaria, by Philip (not the Apostle, but by him who was for this reason called) the Evangelist. The divine word which he preached, he was enabled to confirm by many miraculous operations. Here the holy preacher found a blessed harvest. Unanimity, that first of temporal comforts, attended his ministry. “The people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, *and there was great joy in that city.*” Happy is that city, that village, or that country, to which the reception of Christ’s Gospel is made a cause of rejoicing. Temporal prosperity is a common motive of joy. We call forth our songs of triumph frequently without an adequate reason. But when do we spread our palm branches, and exclaim, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord ²?” When do we take up the words of the Prophet, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of

¹ Eph. iv. 11, 12, 16.

² Matt. xxi. 9.

good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth ¹ ?” Indeed, my brethren, where Christ vouchsafes to appear, we ought to greet him with an holy joy. And, blessed be God ! He is not far from every one of us. Let us hail him as he approaches :—“ Behold ! the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world ² !” Let us receive him as the best friend the world ever knew ; let us love him that we may be entitled to his love ; for he says, “ If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him ³ .” When this is done, and not till then, can we expect to be in the situation of the city of Samaria at that period ; for not till then, can there be *joy, pure unadulterated joy, in this our city.*

In the midst of many real converts, we find one whose name stands high in the records of hypocrisy. There was at that time in this city of Samaria, a celebrated sorcerer, whose name was Simon. Many extraordinary, and, I may add, incredible stories, are related of him by the early writers of the Church, but I confine myself to the simple narrative which St. Luke has given of him. Before this period *he had used sorcery.* In ages less enlightened than the present, it might be considered as an important enquiry, what is meant by the expression ⁴ ? There can be no doubt of the exist-

¹ Is. liii. 7.

² John i. 29.

³ Ibid. xiv. 23.

⁴ “ Witchcraft, or Sorcery, a species of offence against God and religion, of which our ancient books are full, is a crime of which one knows not well what account to give. To deny the possi-

ence of demoniacal possessions at the time of the first propagation of the Gospel, and that it was believed some persons had the power of expelling them. Thus it was objected to our Saviour's miracles, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub." But it does not appear that Simon possessed the power of dispossessing dæmons, or of exciting any supernatural appearances. There were arts of deception, however, which he used, and which had in some measure become scientific among heathen nations, as well as among the Jews. Classical authors relate instances of necromancy, and of conversing with familiar spirits. Saul at Endor is an instance well known; and many allusions of this nature will be found in Scripture, where God permitted his will to be made known by the intervention of wicked men. Though no authentic evidence could be produced on the subject of sorcery as a supernatural agency in modern times, the days are hardly passed when such things found believers even in this country. Two centuries have

bility, nay actual existence of witchcraft and sorcery, is at once flatly to contradict the revealed word of God, in various passages both of the Old and New Testament; and the thing itself is a truth to which every nation in the world hath in its turn borne testimony, by either examples seemingly well attested, or prohibitory laws, which at least suppose the possibility of a commerce with evil spirits. Wherefore it seems the most eligible way to conclude, with an ingenious writer of our own (Mr. Addison, Spect. 117.), that in general there has been such a thing as witchcraft; though one cannot give credit to any particular modern instance of it." Blackstone's Com. V. 4. B. iv. C. 4.

not elapsed since many unhappy persons fell sacrifices to this belief; and the laws against witches, until near the middle of the last century, (9th Geo. II. 1736) continued the disgrace of our statute books. But whatever opinion may be formed on this subject, we need not, I think, go far for an explanation of Simon's occupations; for though it is said he *bewitched* the people of Samaria, we may imagine the meaning of the expression to be, he *fascinated*, he astonished, he threw them into extacies¹, (which is the literal translation) by means of the curious arts which he employed. Modern magicians have done the same²; and like him have given out that themselves were *some great ones*, though none of their admirers have imitated the extravagant praise of the inhabitants of this city of Samaria, who said, "This man is the great power of God."

Simon, affected, it may be, in a degree, with the evidences of divine truth, and struck with the miracles which Philip performed, *believed* and *was baptized*; he did more, he *continued* with the Evangelist, he attached himself to him with peculiar ardour, and beheld with astonishment such wonderful works as far surpassed his own magical operations. We have no reason to suppose that this conduct of Simon originated *wholly* in hypocrisy. Some serious impression appears to have been made on his mind, however, that might have been

¹ Εξίστῳν.

² I may refer to the effects of *magnetism*, as practised even among ourselves.

soon after obliterated by sceptical thoughts, and the delusions of the father of lies, whose works he had professed to follow. St. Luke says he *believed*, and in consequence of that belief he had been admitted to baptism, the distinguishing sign of Christian communion. But that faith must be pure, which leads to salvation. Simon possessed an historical faith, it is true ; he believed perhaps in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but fell far short in the express condition of a saving faith, in *living after Christ*, in leading a *spiritual life*, in making Him the beginning, and the sole end, of his expectations. Though baptism be essentially necessary to all Christians, yet he who does not endeavour to “ perfect holiness in the fear of God ¹,” who does not *add to his faith virtue*, as the fruit of so excellent a tree, can never be a partaker of the real benefits of baptism ; for “ if,” as St. Peter says, “ after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome ; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning ².” A true and justifying faith must be joined with perseverance ; and that, not of men, but by the influence of divine grace ; for “ such,” as the same Apostle says, “ are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ³.”

The faith of the celebrated magician could not resist the temptation of aggrandizing his profession by a desire of possessing those great powers

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

² 2 Pet. ii. 20.

³ 1 Pet. i. 5.

which were communicated by Peter and John to those Samaritans, who had been previously converted, and baptized by Philip; for he thought that they were masters of a magic superior to his own. "When he saw, that through laying on of the Apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power; that on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." The accustomed zeal of Peter kindles at the offer, and in strong language he reproves the offender—"Thy money perish with thee." But as the Gospel of Christ opens the door to the most inveterate offender, he insinuates that even Simon might be forgiven. "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." At this admission the sinner may rejoice; he may also take up the words of Simon, whether pronounced from affected humility, (which from his subsequent life we may imagine to have been the case) or from real contrition, "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me." *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*¹, both in his own case, and in that of others. Happy is it for us that Heaven opens such a communication with man; happier still that this is done *for his sake* who took our nature upon him, who lived and died for us men, and for our salvation.

When we behold a flourishing Church like that

¹ James v. 16.

which Philip planted, let us not forget that *Simon* was one of the Samaritan Christians. With how much awe should we reflect, lest our “heart be not right in the sight of God;” lest we should be, like him, “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” We profess to have *believed* the Gospel, and have been made nominal Christians by baptism; let us beware lest all our Christianity be confined to a name. A radical change must take place in our hearts before we can give true evidence of our faith. “Unless we be converted, and become as little children,” pure, serene, innocent, and holy, living in, and for, Him only *who did no sin, and in whose mouth no guile was found*, we “shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven ¹.” This is a great and important lesson, and applies itself with peculiar force to every member of every Christian congregation. We are liable to deceive ourselves, let us not attempt to deceive God. Let us sift our own hearts, and, with the example of the hypocritical Simon before us, let us prostrate ourselves in the deepest humility before the throne of the divine mercy. “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted ².” “Let him that thinketh he standeth (as most of us do) take heed lest he fall ³.”

The first part of Philip’s mission to the Samaritans being accomplished, he returned, it is probable, with Peter and John to Jerusalem.

¹ Matt. xviii. 3.

² Ibid. xxiii. 12.

³ Rom. x. 12.

An interesting occurrence now presents itself to our view, and Philip once more displays the important powers of an Evangelist. An angel directs him to “go towards the South, to the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desart.” Though ignorant of the purpose of his journey, *he arose and went*. His obedience was implicit; and so should ours be, when we receive the commands of heaven. If our duty call us to Gaza, through the dark and howling wilderness, we may be assured that, some good purpose of Providence is to be answered by it. When Philip arrived at the appointed place, he beheld an Ethiopian nobleman in his chariot; not an indolent and careless traveller, but one who was a Jewish proselyte, and was returning home, after having performed his devotions in the temple of Jerusalem. No way is so long, difficult, or tedious, no expence too much, no fatigue of mind or body too great, for a good man in performing the duties of his religion. Much less should any slender pretence, or trifling excuse, prevent our constant and unwearied attendance on places of public worship. How many thousand miles probably did this Ethiopian travel, that he might prostrate himself in the court of the Gentiles! And we—how many vain excuses have we to plead, with all our pretended knowledge of Christianity, when we have hardly so many yards to walk to some place appropriated to Christian devotion!

Neither, when this Ethiopian left this place of worship, did he leave behind him his religious im-

pressions. “ *Sitting in his chariot* he read Esaias the prophet.” He kept alive, by study and meditation, the sacred flame which had been excited in his breast. “ How will this illustrious personage,” says the pious Bishop Horne, “ arise up in the judgment against all those Christians, who, in the hours of domestic ease and tranquillity, never open a Bible, when he would not even travel without one in the chariot with him ¹.” This should teach us to have our minds at all times prepared for the reception of divine truths. God knows on what part of the field the holy seed may be sown ; but if the soil be ready, every grain will take root, and bring forth abundant fruit. The subject of his study was that truly interesting and important prophecy concerning the passion of Christ ; a prophecy which in modern, as well as ancient times, has made its *noble converts* ². The passage he read was this—“ He was brought as a sheep to the slaughter.” An immediate impulse directed Philip to join himself to the chariot. He heard the sacred words, and inquired of the reader, whether he understood them ? He was answered, that without an interpreter they were dark to him. So may we peruse, and *re-peruse*, the Scriptures without being wise unto salvation, if we never ask ourselves this plain question, *Understandest thou what thou readest ?* An opportunity now presented itself to Philip of clearing the film from the eyes of this

¹ See an excellent Discourse, entitled the Noble Convert, by Bishop Horne. Vol. ii. Disc. 3.

² Burnet’s Life of Lord Rochester.

stranger, and through him, perhaps of accomplishing the conversion of a whole land of unbelievers. Being invited into the chariot, he began his discourse; and from these words, preached unto him the invaluable doctrines of Jesus.

How careful should we be in our passage through life, to seize every opportunity proper for instruction. "A word, and more especially *the* word, spoken in season, how good is it¹!" What delightful moments did the eunuch spend with Philip! How gradually did his knowledge of the truth expand, till the whole mystery of man's redemption was displayed before him! His faith became strong; and nothing could restrain his desire of being made an immediate member of that Church which shewed unto him the way of salvation. "See! *here* is water—what doth hinder me to be baptized?" After making a solemn profession of his faith, "they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him."

From this instance, among many in this history of the Acts of the Apostles, we may observe the great efficacy of preaching. God is with the word. He accompanies the delivery of it with a blessing. He prepares the heart, and the good seed is scattered by his influence. *An Angel* excites Philip to go down to the road to Gaza—the *Spirit* orders him to join himself to the chariot—he finds the Ethiopian *reading a passage of Isaiah*, which of

¹ Prov. xv. 23.

himself he could not understand—he explains the passage, and *preaches Christ crucified*—the convert *believes*, and is *baptized*. Such is the method which our Lord adopts, in the conversion of a sinner. And though we do not always see, as in this case, every link of the chain, yet we may be assured that such connexion of circumstances always exists, and that God arranges and completes the plan. When the effect is not such as might reasonably be expected, to whom, but to ourselves, can we ascribe the miscarriage? The means of salvation have been fully opened to us. But we may inquire with much serious concern, whether we have made the same use of our Bible, or obtained the same advantages from the discourses we have heard, as the treasurer of Candace did, in his short interview with Philip? I leave the question with yourselves; and may all of us be able to answer it with joyful acquiescence before our great and awful Judge!

Let us then improve every opportunity of instruction, though it may be as transitory, as that which the Ethiopian nobleman enjoyed with his Christian teacher; for no sooner was the purpose accomplished for which they were brought together, than “the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip,” to enter upon new scenes of duty, “and the eunuch saw him no more.” He saw him no more in this world, but, as the preacher above-mentioned observes, “in Heaven he will again behold the face of his old Pastor and Father in Christ. Numbered with the Saints of the most

High in glory everlasting, with what pleasure will they then look back upon the time which they spent together in the chariot, over the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah ; that small portion of time, productive of so much never-ending joy and comfort to them both!"

The Ethiopian *went on his way rejoicing* ; he felt that sweet tranquillity of mind which a knowledge of the Gospel must have recently inspired ; a tranquillity which none can feel, but he whose faith is productive of "righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost¹." "But Philip was found at Azotus," a city of Philistia, and after preaching there, he proceeded, in his holy progress, through all the other cities of that country, till he came to Cæsarea.

The several circumstances related in this lecture, happened, according to the chronology adopted in the margin of our Bible, in the course of one year ; the first, after the ascension of our Lord. St. Luke does not profess to write a full history of this important period, but while he records the proceedings of one Apostle or Evangelist, he intimates that the rest were thus employed in other places.

May our meditations on these early portions of Ecclesiastical History confirm our faith, and animate our exertions. The shifting scenes are beautiful and interesting ; but neither beautiful nor in-

¹ Rom. xiv. 17.

teresting will they be to us, unless we reflect their images on our hearts.

“ And may the Almighty God, who by his Son Jesus Christ gave to the Apostles many excellent gifts and graces, and commanded them to feed the flock entrusted to their care, give his grace to all spiritual pastors, diligently to preach his holy word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory through Jesus Christ our Lord ¹.” Amen.

¹ Collect for St. Peter's Day.

LECTURE X.

ACTS IX. 1—31.

The Conversion of St. Paul—His preaching at, and escape from, Damascus, &c. Damascus — Arabia — Damascus—Jerusalem—Cæsarea—Tarsus. A.D. 35—37.

A TRANSITION from the gloom and melancholy of a dungeon to the cheering and brilliant rays of the sun, is but a faint representation of that change which takes place in the heart of man, when it passes from a full conviction of sin, to a participation of those great and precious promises delivered by the Gospel of Christ. A more striking instance of this truth will hardly be found, than that which is now presented to us in the conversion of St. Paul.

We have seen him, and in this history continue to behold him, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.” Unappeased with persecution, at the distance of a whole year, as some suppose, after the death of Stephen, he solicits a commission from the Jewish rulers to pursue the unhappy Christian fugitives to

the city of Damascus, where many of them had found a shelter. Time, with the grace of God, will soothe, and finally subdue, the most inveterate enmities. But if God's grace be wanting, not one year, nor many years, will make any impression. In St. Paul's case, his offence was repeatedly and deliberately committed. "*Beyond measure*," says he, "I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it." "I punished them *oft* in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." But what the natural man could not perform, was effected by the wonderful and miraculous operations of the Spirit of God. "By the grace of God," he says again, "I am what I am ¹." What St. Paul's sensations were on this happy change of his condition, will be best understood from his own language. The extreme warmth and piety of his effusions, the zealous solicitude for the salvation of others, the calm confidence of his own expectations, the firmness of his faith, the eloquence of his preaching, the candour and liberality of his mind, and the intrepidity of his conduct, are circumstances that bespeak, not less the inspiration of the Apostle, than the eminence of the man. Read St. Luke's account of him, and you will be lost in reverence and admiration. Peruse his own public and familiar epistles, and your breast will be animated by a spark of his

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

fire; your devotion will kindle in his very words, and exclaim, “ I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me ¹ !”

The narrative of St. Paul's conversion leaves behind it the most extraordinary impressions. It differs from that of all other men, as it arose from an instantaneous supernatural impulse, attended with external circumstances of much efficacy and weight. It was a miracle of the mind; and intended to shew that some greater work was to be done by him than by the other Apostles. And as an evidence of this, they had no connexion with him; they were at a distance from him; for many years, most of them never saw him; and yet the doctrines which they all taught were the same, with this difference in the mode of communication, that St. Paul was the first who preached them to the Gentiles, that is, to such nations as were not of the original stock of Abraham. “ When it pleased God,” said he, “ who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood ²,” with those who had been in the ministry before me. Surely this must be thought an irrefragable evidence of the truth of Christianity, as nothing short of an immediate revelation could have produced so wonderful a combination of events. God, of his boundless mercy and goodness, that he might manifest in him an

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

² Gal. i. 15, 16.

illustrious instance of his clemency, and might reveal the knowledge of his Son by a more extensive diffusion of his doctrines, converts him by a miracle; and of an enemy and destroyer of the Church, makes him an herald of the Gospel, an assiduous and zealous propagator of the Christian faith.

Behold him on his way to Damascus with his bloody commission in his hand; a commission not *given* him to execute as a minister of public justice, but *sought for* and obtained by him with eager solicitude. Often, when we least expect it, grace is at hand, and the over-powering goodness of God melts the most obdurate heart. At mid-day, in the height and splendour of the sun, this eminent and conspicuous character was surprised by a still more bright and luminous appearance; “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven,” emblematic of that light which was about to penetrate his soul; a light, which, as it were, diffused itself from the body of his Saviour, who was, and is, “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world¹.” Prostrate on the ground he heard these words, “Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” “I am thy Saviour, who have done, and suffered, so many and so great things for thee; I am he whom thou now grievously distressest in the persons of my faithful servants and followers. But

¹ John i. 9.

the time is now come, when thy proud heart must submit to my teaching. Neither the preaching, nor the death of Stephen, neither miracles, nor arguments, made any impression on thee. I now appear to thee in a more express and wonderful manner, and appoint thee to a great and glorious work, which I call upon thee to perform. Resistance is in vain. “*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*” “Thou wilt find it as difficult to resist the will of Heaven, as an unruly animal to oppose the instigation of its master.” For the first time, the language of the persecutor is softened to compunction, “Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?” He throws himself on the good pleasure of his Saviour, and, as an obedient convert, waits for his direction. He does not remain long in suspense, as the heavenly vision commands him to proceed to Damascus, where it should be told him what he must do.

There is some difference in the particulars of this account given *by St. Luke of St. Paul's conversion*, from his own eloquent narrative before King Agrippa; and at another time when he related the same circumstance to the Jews. The difference, however, does not amount to a contradiction; but is merely an enlargement of the expressions, and a more exact designation of the office which he was called upon to perform. It is indeed said, that his companions “heard a voice, but saw no man;” and in another place, that they “heard *not* the voice of him that spake to him; which will easily

be understood to denote that they heard a sound, but understood not the meaning of the words.

The great effulgence deprived St. Paul of his eye-sight; an event graciously intended by Providence to strengthen the powers of his mind. How often have we occasion to be grateful for some great privation of our bodily powers! With all our faculties complete, we use them too frequently for unworthy purposes. When suspended by the will of the Almighty, we begin to understand their value; and the mind, as well as body, is restored to sounder health by the temporary experience of a painful disorder.

After St. Paul had been three days at Damascus, fasting, blind, and in a religious extacy, he is visited, in consequence of a vision to them both, by Ananias, a Christian disciple; doubtless an ordained minister, and a chief member of the Church established in that city. When the vision acquaints Ananias with the person to whom he must be sent, human nature startles at the danger. "This is the great persecutor of the Christians, how can I approach him?" But the Lord over-rules his fears by a prophetic revelation of his future conduct. "He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and Kings, and the children of Israel; for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." The vision does not direct Ananias to instruct him, but says *the Lord will shew him*. This is in conformity with St. Paul's declaration, "I neither received it of men,

neither was I taught it, -but by the revelation of Jesus Christ ¹."

Pretended visions and extacies of mind, totally different from this supernatural rapture of St. Paul, are the foundation of enthusiastic actions. But he who has experienced a certain celestial abstraction, during the calm periods of meditation ; who diligently arranges and adjusts his thoughts in the midst of solitude and silence, will find the impressions of a pure religion at such seasons, most lively, and most grateful ; a new and holy intercourse appears to be opened with his Maker ; he becomes more sensible of his Redeemer's love ; he feels the *healthful Spirit of his grace*, and is refreshed by the *continual dew of his heavenly blessings*.

In the midst of these holy aspirations, it is a beautiful picture to behold Ananias approach the prostrate, and repenting, servant, of the High Priests. He brings a message of peace and comfort, he lays his hands upon him, and tells him *who* had sent him ; one, now not unknown to him, who had seen and pitied his condition ; he repeats the words of consolation, "Receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." In proof of the miracle, scales, as it were, fell from the eyes of the Apostle ; he is convinced of the truth of this new religion ; his mental, as well as his bodily, eyes were opened ; he lost no time in manifesting his conviction ; he *arose* from his posture of humble resigna-

¹ Gal. i. 12.

tion, and received the blessed sign of his Christian faith—*he was baptized*; and having received meat, after his long and religious fast, was *strengthened*, both with inward and outward consolation, and made ready for those arduous enterprizes which he was now to undertake.

Many very important observations arise from the history of the conversion of St. Paul. It would be a reprehensible omission to pass over those of a noble and ingenious writer, who has deduced, from this transaction, strong and unanswerable arguments in favour of the truth of revelation. This interesting essay offers itself, with great propriety, to the scepticism of the present age, as the author, who is said to have once wavered in his faith, became a sincere convert, under the divine will, from his own reflections. A few of his arguments I will here briefly enumerate.

It must of necessity be, says Lord Lyttleton, that the person attesting these things of himself, was either an impostor, or an enthusiast, one who deceived himself, or was deceived by the fraud of others; or, what he declared, did really happen; and therefore that the Christian is a divine revelation.

That he was not an impostor, will appear by proving that he had no rational motives, or means, to undertake and carry on such an imposture. If he expected to gratify his temporal interest or ambition, he would be mistaken; for the death of Christ had made no impression on the Chief Priests and Rulers, and these were St. Paul's masters, from whom alone he must have looked

for promotion. Nay, they had begun a severe persecution against the followers of Christ, in which St. Paul himself took an active part. At this instant of time, and under these circumstances, he became a convert. What could be his motives? Was it the hope of increasing his wealth? The certain consequence of taking that part, was not only the loss of all that he had, but of all hopes of acquiring more. Those whom he left were the disposers of wealth, of dignity, of power, in Judea; those whom he went to, were indigent men, oppressed, and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. Therefore his temporal expectations must have arisen from his first conduct, not his second. As to reputation, too, that lay all on the side he forsook. The sect he embraced were under the greatest, and most universal, contempt of any then in the world. Was it then the love of power that prompted his behaviour? Power, over whom? Over a flock of sheep, driven to the slaughter, whose Shepherd himself had been murdered a little before. Besides, he assumed no peculiar pre-eminence in the Church. On the contrary, he declared himself the *least of them*, and *less than the least of all the saints*. Neither did St. Paul attempt to innovate any thing in government or civil affairs, he meddled not with legislation, he formed no commonwealths, he raised no seditions, he affected no temporal power. Obedience to their rulers was the doctrine he preached to the Churches he planted, and what he taught he practised himself. The cause why he interested

himself so much for his converts was, as he tells them, that they might be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life ; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Are these the words of an impostor, desiring nothing but temporal power? No, they are evidently written by one who looked beyond the bounds of this life ; one who "preached not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord." And all this was done in true humility of mind ; for though he had the advantage of an higher education, and superior learning, he made no improper use of these attainments, either by claiming a supremacy over other Apostles, or setting at nought those less learned than himself. "I came not," he says, "with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified ; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." St. Paul, therefore, by the change he made, had nothing to gain, but had every thing to give up ; he gave up an advancing fortune, and an high reputation ; he gave up his friends, his relatives, and family ; he gave up his religion ; and in return had every injury to fear. Whoever professed the Gospel under these circumstances, continues our author, without an entire conviction of its being a divine

revelation, must have been mad; and if he made others profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad; for no man who had the least spark of humanity could subject his fellow-creatures to so many miseries as he knew must inevitably ensue, nor could any man that possessed the least ray of reason, expose himself to share them with those he deceived, in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false.

As St. Paul had no rational motives, so he had no rational means of making an imposture successful. He had no associates. Not even the Apostles were in any confederacy with him. Therefore it is not probable, nay it is impossible, that he could solely contend with the power of the magistrates, the interest of the priests, the prejudices of the people, or the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

From the same kind of reasoning it may be proved, that St. Paul was no enthusiast. He had none of the usual marks of such a character. He possessed indeed a warmth of temper, but it was at all times controuled by discretion. Neither melancholy, ignorance, credulity, vanity, or self-conceit, could be imputed to him. Besides, a mere enthusiast could never perform real miracles as St. Paul did, in many instances.

If St. Paul then did not deceive himself, it is still less likely that a person of his description, could be deceived by the fraud of others. It was impossible for the disciples of Christ to conceive such a thought, as that of turning his persecutor into his

Apostle, and to do this by a fraud in the very instant of his greatest fury against them, or their Lord. If they had even thought of such a conversion, they could not have effected it in the same way; they could not have produced a light in the air brighter than the mid-day sun; they could not have made Saul, and Saul *alone*, hear *words* proceeding from that light; they could not first have made him blind, and then restored him to sight, and made scales fall from his eyes; above all, no fraud of others could produce the miracles he performed after his conversion. It appears, then, from all these arguments, that St. Paul neither deceived himself, nor was deceived by the fraud of others, that he was no impostor, nor enthusiast; and then it follows, that what he related to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore, *the Christian Religion is a divine revelation*¹.

No event in the history of the primitive Apostles affords so many, and such important topics for reflection, as the conversion of St. Paul. We behold *in him* what *we* are by nature; we see in *him*, allowing for the miraculous gifts which distinguished the first effusion of the Gospel, what *we may be* by grace. A man may possess many es-

¹ I have here briefly abridged the argument, and in many places used the words, of Lord Lyttleton, in his "Considerations upon the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul." I strongly recommend the whole Essay to the reader's perusal.

timable qualities, and yet come short of salvation. St. Paul “ profited in the Jews’ religion above many of his equals in his own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers ¹ ;” and “ touching the righteousness which was in the law, he declares himself *blameless* ² .” At the same time, he neither understood, nor desired *the things of the Spirit* ; he was ignorant of their real value ; he turned from them with indignation ; he punished those who possessed them ; he contradicted and blasphemed. And what do we more than St. Paul, in his unconverted days, when we rely on our own works for salvation ? Many excellent moral qualifications, perhaps, from habit or constitution, we may possess ; we may be courteous, obliging, condescending ; we may be even temperate, honest, and industrious ; and yet, as these do not arise from a well-grounded faith, they have no immortal seeds within them. We may be assured, like St. Paul, that *the law is spiritual* ; like him too we may *live without it*. Our professions are empty, our expectations visionary, unless we acknowledge all our hopes and dependencies to be founded on the free grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But it has been alleged, from the example of this Apostle, that this grace is irresistible. He is called “ a chosen vessel ³ ;” and he says of himself, that “ God separated him from his mother’s

¹ Gal. i. 14.

² Phil. iii. 6.

³ Acts ix. 15.

womb, and called him by his grace ¹.” God from everlasting has elected a chosen seed ; and he has put into the minds of individuals such preventing grace as to incline them to fulfil his holy will. He it is “ who makes us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ ².” But he shews us, that we may oppose that will, and resist that grace, which he is thus willing to bestow. “ Quench not the Spirit ³,” says St. Paul himself ; thus allowing that the perverseness and iniquity of man may extinguish that heavenly spark of vital Christianity, which God in his great mercy had kindled in his breast. The prophet Isaiah says, in the person of the Almighty, “ When I called, ye did not answer ; when I spake, ye did not hear ; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not ⁴.” St. Paul’s companions, in his journey to Damascus, saw the same miraculous effulgence which he did ; they heard also the sound of the voice, though they understood not the words which were uttered. But we do not find that they became converts to the Gospel, notwithstanding they must have had the circumstance of this singular vision explained to them. When our Lord himself prayed publicly to his Father, he was answered by a voice from Heaven. The people that stood by heard it, and said that it thundered. “ Jesus answered and said, This voice

¹ Gal. i. 15.

³ 1 Thess. v. 19.

² Heb. xiii. 21.

⁴ Isai. lxxv. 12.

came not because of me, but for your sake¹." Yet what was the result? The Evangelist remarks, immediately after detailing the conversation, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, (of which this was a splendid and impressive instance), yet they believed not on him²." The grace of God, therefore, is not irresistible; and hardened and impenitent man is many times guilty of this great and crying sin.

But the conversion of St. Paul continues still further to assure us, that the grace of God, though it may be resisted, is yet open to all who duly call upon him for it; and besides, so ready is he to communicate such an invaluable blessing to us, that it arises wholly from his good pleasure, and not from any merit of any kind in ourselves. This doctrine requires our whole attention, and produces that entire acquiescence in the will of God, which is the surest mark of our Christian profession. Thus is salvation offered to sinners by the Gospel of Christ, as pure in its motives, as it is inconceivable in its manner. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to die for our sins³." So great and disinterested was the motive, so infinite and invaluable was the sacrifice. Sensible that this was his only hope, St. Paul gladly accepts this grace, and presents himself as an example to others, who, like him, should shut their eyes to the true and the right way, and guide their miserable steps to the dark chambers of death.

¹ John xii. 30.

² Ibid. v. 37.

³ Ibid. iii. 16.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting¹.” “Unto me,” he says again, “who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ².”

If we take St. Paul as a pattern for our repentance, according to his own direction, let us endeavour to *work out our salvation* by the same means. How humble, how truly dejected is his language of conviction! “I am the chief of sinners!” “Oh! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death³?” How confident, how grateful, how thankful, when he has found the refuge of his faith. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” If we err with St. Paul, let us repent with him; and then, “though our sins were as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool⁴.”

St. Paul was no sooner himself instructed in the heavenly doctrines of the Gospel, than he began to impart his knowledge to others. “*Straightway*, immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues,”

¹ 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

² Rom. vii. 24.

³ Ephes. iii. 8.

⁴ Isai. i. 18.

although the Christians at Damascus had not yet conquered their fears of his character; an example to us, that every day which we do not employ in cultivating our own means of salvation, or promoting that of other men, is totally lost to us, or rather will be cast into the scale against us, and increase our condemnation.

But St. Paul did not, at this time, continue long at Damascus. That his conversion might not appear to be the work of men, neither his knowledge of Christianity to be derived from the Apostles, but immediately by divine revelation, he says, "I went not up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus¹." The account of this journey is not reported by St. Luke. On his return to Damascus, after three years, he recommenced his holy mission; his spiritual *strength* was improved; his word *confounded* the Jews: he proved, what they were not willing to understand, that Jesus was *very Christ*. This excited their resentment, and they sought his life. Their interest with the governor procured guards to watch the gates of the city. But as Divine Providence had reserved him for important purposes, "the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket, and he escaped his hands." Self-preservation is a first law of nature. We are not rashly to endanger that life which is given us for excellent purposes. St. Paul submitted to an ex-

¹ Gal. i. 17.

pedient which God permitted to be successful. The ways of Providence are easy and satisfactory ; and, whatever they may appear to the dim sight of mortals, are always beneficial. Even in the propagation of Christianity itself, a miracle is never resorted to, where the same effect could be produced by other means.

At this period, St. Paul, after an interval of three years ¹, returned to Jerusalem ; as he says, *to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days*. He saw also the Apostle James, but had no communication with the other disciples, neither did the Church receive his ministry till after his introduction by Barnabas. Now we behold him no timorous preacher of the Gospel, but freely associating with the brethren ; and “ *speaking boldly*, in the name of the Lord Jesus,” on that very spot which he had distinguished by the severity of his persecutions. So wonderfully do both time and place frequently bear witness to a salutary change of conduct. But he was not in less danger at Jerusalem, than at Damascus. The Grecian Jews, if I may so call them, were his opponents ; and as they could not subdue him by argument, “ they went about to slay him.” A second time his life is preserved. His friends “ *brought* him down to Cæsarea,” as to a place of safety, and from thence “ sent him forth to his native city of Tarsus.”

This point of time, four years after the crucifixion of our Saviour, forms an era in the history

¹ A.D. 37.

of the Church. Persecution for a period paused. The work of God increased. The votaries of Christianity multiplied exceedingly. "Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied ¹."

This is an happy description of a Christian Church; and, as we enjoy, and, by the blessing of God, have long enjoyed, a state of rest and composure in our religious establishment, let us not, by our negligence and lukewarmness, be defective in our Christian character; for though there be comfort in such rest, there always must be danger. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ²;" therefore should we *keep it with all carefulness and diligence*.

We have seen the Apostle Paul "breathing out threatenings and slaughter." We have conducted him, after a happy change in his condition, to his peaceful home at Tarsus. Let us, in our peaceful and comfortable homes, worship the God of Paul,

¹ This cessation of persecution is thought to have arisen from the situation of the Jewish nation at this period. Petronius approached Jerusalem with the intention of placing the statue of the Emperor Caligula in the temple. "The Jews were fully employed in warding off this terrible blow from themselves, and from the *temple*, which was their glory and confidence. Under so general a consternation, and in such circumstances of distress, they could not have the heart, or the leisure, to look after, or persecute the Christians." Benson.

² Jer. xvii. 9.

through that blessed Saviour, who appeared to him in the way, in such transcendent brightness ; and while, with the eye of faith, we behold the glorious effulgence, let us prostrate every will and affection of our souls, and say, “ Lord ! what wilt thou have me to do ? ” He will assuredly reply, “ Arise, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” Pour into our hearts, O Lord, this grateful knowledge, that we “ having in remembrance the wonderful conversion of thy Apostle, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught, through Jesus Christ our Lord ¹.” Amen.

¹ Collect for St. Paul's day.

LECTURE XI.



ACTS IX. 32, &c. X.

St. Peter's miracles—Vision—Conversion of Cornelius—Lydda—Joppa—Cæsarea. A.D. 38—41.

THE tranquillity of the Church of Christ, at this period of its history, afforded an opportunity for those *trees of righteousness* to flourish, which were of the *Lord's planting*¹. Its ministers were zealous and industrious, and the Spirit of God, in a sensible manner, accompanied their preaching. The pure and unadulterated doctrines of the Gospel began to prevail on every side by their means; they pursued the advantage, nor ceased from the spiritual contest, till, in a sounder sense than was said of a great monarch of old, they had *no more worlds to conquer*.

A few years before this time, we left the Apostle Peter at Jerusalem, having returned thither after the transactions with John and Philip at Samaria. The enmity of the Jewish rulers against the Christians having subsided for the present, he sets forward again to visit the Churches which had been established, in various parts of the country, by the

¹ Isaiah lxi. 3.

disciples who had been dispersed by the persecutions in Jerusalem. This was a circuit which must have given great comfort to his mind. No impediments from without, were in his way. Calmness and serenity every where prevailed. The congregations of Christians whom he visited were justly denominated *saints*; they were separated from a wicked world for holy purposes, they were sanctified by the waters of baptism and spiritual regeneration, they were *holy, as He that called them was holy*. These *little flocks* may well make us ashamed, who are in very different outward situations. We are, blessed be God! under no dread of severe persecutions for religion's sake; we reside under the happiest auspices in Church and State; and yet, we have not only no ambition to be accounted *saints*, in the true and pure acceptance of the word, but are neither afraid, nor ashamed, to be called *sinner*s. Let us shrink from the observation; and endeavour to recover our former place in the history of the Churches, by imitating these primitive patterns in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, by stirring up the gift that is in us; by *walking* more circumspectly *in the fear of the Lord*, and regaining, through Him who is the Head of *all* Churches, the salutary and reviving *comfort of the Holy Ghost*.

In the course of this journey St. Peter came to Lydda; and, as his object was a speedy and a sure conviction of the truth of Christianity, he effected, by a word, the restoration of a poor cripple, who for eight years had been bed-ridden with the palsy.

“Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” I bring comfort to thee in his name who came purposely to heal the spiritual diseases of the world; in testimony of whose power and presence, I say unto thee, “*Arise, and make thy bed.*” During many tedious years, others have spread thy couch for thee; now spread it for thyself. The miracle was immediate, the consequence extensive. *All that dwelt in Lydda*, and in the fruitful and delightful valley of *Saron*, (or Sharon) *saw him* (and it may be imagined *heard him too*) *and turned to the Lord!*

At the distance of six miles was Joppa, a seaport town, which had just been deprived of a valuable inhabitant. Tabitha (better known perhaps by her Greek name Dorcas) was dead. We have an interesting picture of her friends in the hour of their lamentation, honourable to the deceased, and creditable to themselves. They are represented as recounting her good deeds with many expressions of tenderness, and shewing the charitable effects of her industry, the coats and garments she had wrought for the poor. Not content with fruitless tears, they dispatch two messengers to Joppa, and earnestly entreat a visit from Peter; an account of whose miracle had reached them. He came. God gave a blessing to his prayers; and she, who was already dressed for her funeral solemnity, is presented alive to her anxious and afflicted friends. Have we ever been recalled from the last extremity of sickness, to a state of health and strength? Have we ever received a friend, a brother, a child,

an husband, or a wife, after so near an approach to the chamber of death? If we have, we may judge, from their feelings who waited for the approach of Dorcas, or from our own on similar occasions, what ought to be our thankfulness, what ought to be our conduct! But above all, if we ourselves, or our friends, have been rescued at the same time from the death of sin to a life of righteousness, our tribute of gratitude to Him who hath thus “brought us out of darkness to his marvellous light¹,” ought to be as boundless, as extensive, as his mercy.

But the miracles of St. Peter did not end with their immediate accomplishment: in Joppa, as in Lydda, *many*, in consequence of them, *believed in the Lord*. Admiration, love, gratitude, and every amiable passion, were excited by them. Inquiry was made into their nature; by whom, and in whose name, they were performed. The great Author of our religion was magnified, and his Church multiplied greatly. The increase of the Christian congregation at Joppa, occasioned St. Peter to take up his residence among them for *many days*.

After an interval of three years², in which we may imagine large additions were made to the Church in different quarters, a circumstance of considerable importance took place by the means of Peter, which greatly enlarged the sphere of the Apostle’s preaching; and in which we, who are not

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

² A.D. 41.

of the original stock of Israel, are particularly interested.

The peculiar prejudices of the Jews, not to communicate with those of another nation, are well known, both from sacred and profane history. Their rejection of our Saviour as the promised Messiah, though constituting a guilt of no common magnitude, did not yet shut them totally out from the tender mercies of God, if upon the preaching of his Apostles and Evangelists, they would turn from their former faults, and acknowledge the dignity and divinity of his person. But when they continued hardened and impenetrable, and refused this repeated offer of salvation, God pleased to *cast them off*, and raise for himself a Church among other nations. Yet, in the midst of judgment, God still remembers mercy; a door is still open to the Jews, that a remnant might be saved. Thus St. Paul says, "Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid! But rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness¹?"

The introduction of this important doctrine, is first revealed to us in the subsequent history of the conversion of Cornelius. A vision is sent, much about the same time, to St. Peter, who was still at Joppa, and to Cornelius, a resident military

¹ Rom. xi. 11, 12.

officer at Cæsarea ; appointing one to be the joyful messenger of these tidings, and the other to be the first convert upon this principle.

There is something so amiable in St. Luke's character of Cornelius, that we feel greatly interested in his welfare. It is true he was born an heathen, and probably educated amidst the luxuries of the Roman court ; but we behold him, in this history, endowed with a natural disposition of mind, so congenial to a reception of the Christian graces, that we rejoice to find him ready to accept the offered salvation. At this time Judea was a Roman province, and the Emperor kept a garrison in different parts of the country, to controul the Jews. Cornelius had the command of that at Cæsarea, and he appears to have been so sensible of the importance and delicacy of his situation, that he endeavoured to distinguish himself as the *better soldier*, by becoming the *better man*.

But we must not imagine that Cornelius, though a Roman born, was a worshipper of Roman gods. We are told that he was "*a devout man, and feared God with all his house.*" These expressions never could refer to an idolater. We have before had occasion to observe *who* were called "*devout men,*" namely, proselytes *from every quarter under heaven* ; men, who had left the worship of their false gods, and had joined themselves to the Jewish worship ; and so were called proselytes of the gate, proselytes who were admitted only into the outer court of the temple at Jerusalem, who were neither required to be circumcised, nor to conform to any

of the Mosaical rites and ceremonies, but only to certain general rules, called the commandments of Noah.

It is material that we should thus consider the religious situation of Cornelius, as two very important observations arise from it.

1. We ought to consider it as a peculiar blessing of Providence, to be born and educated in a country where the name of God is known, where his worship is truly, and acceptably, performed, and where the means and opportunities of salvation are at hand. If Cornelius had still dwelt among his countrymen, the Italians, where he was bred and born, or in any other province of that empire, he had, in all likelihood, never come to this saving and blessed knowledge of the true God, but died a pagan as he was born. But by this occasion of living at Cæsarea, within the confines of the land of Israel, where the oracles of the most High God were daily resounded and his worship professed, he became a blessed convert to the *true* God, whom he served, and worshipped, acceptably, with all his house. From hence we should learn to be more thankful to God than we commonly are, for that happy condition of Providence in which we are born. For we might, if it had pleased him, have been born and dwelt among those who had no knowledge of his word or promise, which was really the case of the ancient inhabitants of the island we now possess. But behold his goodness and mercy! We are born of *Christian* parents, and dwell in a *Christian* country, and thus made

partakers of the name and livery of Christ as soon as we were born. Nay, we might have been placed even in a *Christian* nation, where the corruptions of this holy profession might have led us into great difficulties and dangers, but by the blessing of God we are members of a pure and reformed Church, and our danger only arises from the misapplication of so inestimable a benefit¹.

2. The second observation on the character of Cornelius, as a Jewish proselyte, is this: that it takes away the argument from those who think outward works a sufficient mark of their religion, and quote these passages with triumph, “thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;” “in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” No man doubts the efficacy of righteous deeds, for without them he cannot be saved. But no man can read his Bible without knowing that good works are the *effects* of faith, and that to perform them acceptably, they must be done in faith, that is, in the name, and for the sake, of Christ. And unless we believe in Christ as he is revealed to us in the gospel, “as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” we can do nothing *for his sake*. Cornelius, doubtless, as a Jewish proselyte, looked for salvation in the Saviour promised by the Jewish Scriptures, and expected by the faithful of that nation. “Thus Abraham believed in God, and it was counted

¹ See Joseph Mede's Works, p. 66.

² John i. 29.

unto him for righteousness¹." They, therefore, who were of this faith, were "blessed with faithful Abraham." "Before faith came (says St. Paul) we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith *which should afterwards be revealed*². Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." Cornelius therefore did not, any more than a true disciple of the Gospel, look for salvation through his *works*, but through the promise of him to whom he was directed by the law itself. Before this period, in the history of this pious centurion, we have no reason to imagine that he had been made acquainted with the actual appearance of the great Messiah; but having heard the joyful tidings, he was ready to accept them.

But without any reference to Cornelius as a professor of the Jews' religion, still their argument will be futile, who imagine themselves entitled to an eternal reward, without any religion at all. If moral goodness had been sufficient to entitle any one to salvation, there would have been no occasion for the conversion of Cornelius. With respect to practical duties, he appears to have been as perfect as his state would admit of. Yet *more* was required of him. "Send men to Joppa, and call for Peter; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." So long as he had no opportunity of hearing the truths of Christianity, the want of faith could not be imputed as a crime. But will this be accepted as an excuse for us, who know, or at least

¹ Rom. iv. 3.² Gal. iii. 24.

may know, the blessed Gospel of Christ? By no means. *Repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, are the means, the only means, of *our* salvation. They must therefore suppose themselves much better men than Cornelius, who rely on their own exertions, as a meritorious cause of their acceptance with God; and they must indeed have a very defective knowledge of Christianity, who think it immaterial what faith they profess, so long as they perform the moral duties of their situation; and who, though they have been baptized according to the will of their Saviour, continue mere moral *pagans*, or, if they will, mere moral *men* in their hearts. Morality, without religion, is as a body without a soul. Christianity is a religion of motives; and if we have no sound motives as the foundation of our actions, no causes beyond the pleasure or displeasure of this world, nothing to hope, nothing to fear; and above all, if we have nothing to redeem us from the penalty of numerous sins, which the best of mortal men are conscious they commit, of what value is mere human integrity? or what stability shall we give to our own, or another's conduct? But all is reconciled by the divine doctrines of the Gospel; all is comprised in this immortal truth—"Eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord¹!"

Under these sanctions, the piety and benevolence of Cornelius were accepted of God. Let us

¹ Rom. vi. 23.

rest our meditations upon them for a moment, as most salutary and beneficial to us. He was a *devout man*, not only as denoting his religious principle as a Proselyte of the Gate, but generally, pious and holy, having a reference to God in every action of his life. This principle is the source of pure and unalloyed happiness. It heightens every true enjoyment, and soothes every painful feeling. None but those who have felt the delights of devotion, know how much serenity it diffuses around it, and how pure are the pleasures it affords. Devotion, in this sense, denotes no particular act of worship, but a continued and confirmed habit of piety and goodness. Every action of our lives must be tinctured with a sense of duty. That pure Spirit, who works this transporting influence in our breasts, must be earnestly solicited for a continuance of his presence. Then the devout man will feel the benefit of this happy disposition of his mind, and the arrow which pierces others to the heart, will be turned aside from hurting him.

This holy principle produces corresponding effects in every bosom connected with it. “Cornelius feared God *with all his house*.” This is a tender trait of character which well deserves our admiration. When leading on his army to certain victory in defence of his country, he is not more truly noble, than when we behold him in his domestic circle, communicating kindness and instruction to all around him. He hears their wants, he shares their joys and sorrows; he relieves, according to

his ability, all their necessities. But above all, their spiritual welfare sits nearest to his soul. He expounds the Scriptures, and they all fall prostrate on their knees, in the inexpressibly pleasing employment of family worship. It adds considerable beauty and interest to the picture, to observe a *devout soldier*, afterwards selected to carry the important request to Peter, attending his master on this occasion. He had followed him, perhaps, in many a hard campaign, and having fought gallantly by his side, retires with him, from scenes which, however necessary, are always dreadful, to receive religious instruction in the bosom of a peaceful family. Pious masters will generally have pious servants. The principle of piety diffuses itself like a genial dew, and all within its influence are refreshed by it. “Behold! how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is, as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore ¹.”

Prayers and alms-deeds complete this character of Cornelius. Not only public, or family worship, but private supplications, keep open the intercourse with Heaven. How immediate the communication is, the prayer of Cornelius will tell us; and how efficacious the distribution of alms, we find by the direct approbation of Heaven on the same occasion. But the measure of our prayers,

¹ Psalm cxxxiii. 1—3.

or our alms, must not be stinted. "Freely ye have received, freely give ¹." Abridge yourselves of every vain amusement; deduct from every moment, dedicated to an over-anxious application even to necessary business; and devoutly address yourselves to Heaven. Give not to the Lord of that which costs you nothing. Charity is no charity if not attended with some degree of self-denial. "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thy iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor ²." Cornelius's hand was as open as his heart; and we may imagine that we behold the devout soldier, who makes no indifferent part of this history, privately distributing his master's charity; for "he gave *much* alms to the people, and prayed to God *always*"—liberal to men, he could not but be grateful to his God.

That these duties might be acceptably performed, the Centurion used such pious means as the Church in all ages has directed—he *fasted* as well as prayed. "Four days ago," said he, "I was *fasting* unto this hour;" at that moment, and under that sacred impression, the heavenly vision appeared to him. Severe abstinences, or superstitious fasts, are by no means recommended. But as we know that, the corruptible body will press down the soul, we should attend to the practice of Cornelius, confirmed by the experience of St. Paul. "I will keep under my body, and bring it into subjection ³." What pious man does not see, does

¹ Matt. x. 8.

² Dan. iv. 27.

³ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

not *feel* the advantage of this ! For how can piety and prayer be generated in the heart, in the midst of full meals and thoughtless pleasure ? “ When I fed them to the full,” says the Prophet Jeremiah, “ they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots’ houses ¹.” He who knows not the benefit of self-denial, never takes up his cross after Christ, and therefore cannot be his true disciple.

Thus prepared by God with his preventing grace, an angel appears to Cornelius, and directs him to send for Peter. When the messengers arrived, they found the Apostle in the same holy disposition of mind, *fasting* and *praying* on the flat roof of his house ; a place of silence and secrecy, much resorted to in those warm climates. Houses of this construction are to be met with in Palestine at this day. In this situation, St. Peter is commissioned by an impressive vision to go to Cornelius, informing him that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was broken down, and that he ought not any longer to act under the impression of such distinctions. He beheld “ a sheet let down from heaven, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air ;” that is, all animals distinguished in the Levitical law as clean, or unclean, such as the Jews might, or might not, use as common food. He is directed by the voice to *slay and eat*. On a remonstrance that such in-

¹ Jer. v. 7.

discriminate food was unlawful for him as a Jew, he is emphatically told “ what God hath cleansed, that call not thou unclean.” The repetition of the vision impresses it on his understanding, and he comes down to the messengers free from every Jewish prejudice, and ready to undertake the important part of his commission, to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

While St. Peter meditated on these uncommon circumstances, “ the Holy Ghost said, Go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them.” When we are assured that Providence hath called us to any particular appointment, our obedience should be ready and implicit. St. Peter once said, “ Lord, I will go with thee both into prison and to death ¹.” And though we may have no reason to imagine, from any sudden supernatural impulse, that we are directly called by the Spirit, yet, as a line of conduct is marked out to us by the profession of life in which we are engaged, we should diligently fulfil the appropriate duties of it, and be as alert in the execution of them, as St. Peter, when he attended the messengers to Cæsarea.

At the door of his house Cornelius met him, and, impressed with the sanctity of his character, would have paid him that respect which was usual in oriental countries. But the modesty of Peter resisted the excessive compliment, and explains to us *how far* courtesy may be given and received. It might have afforded a lesson of humility to the

¹ Luke xxii. 33.

pretended successors of St. Peter, as it certainly does to all who profess the unaspiring religion of the meek and humble Jesus.

Cornelius had assembled "his kinsfolk and near friends" (for natural affection speaks with a voice that will be heard) to receive the benefit of this heavenly conference, in which Jewish prejudice, for the first time, yielded to the general welfare of mankind. St. Peter explains the reasons why he stood there among them; and Cornelius declares for what intent he had sent for him. Heaven had directed both. But we may observe, that the angel, which appeared to the Roman, did not proceed to instruct him himself, but referred him to Peter, as our Lord had before done in the vision, when St. Paul was sent to Ananias. Extraordinary means of information are never to be expected, where ordinary instruction can be found. A truth which destroys enthusiasm in every shape, and places the faith of the Gospel above imposture or deceit.

We now behold the pious family of Cornelius presenting itself before the Apostle, in that happy frame of mind, with that holy and teachable disposition, which every worshipper of God ought to endeavour to possess, in the temple of the Lord. "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

In this sermon of St. Peter he has three great objects in view. 1. To shew that good men of *all* nations, without *respect of persons*, were to be par-

takers of the benefits of Christ's death, and that the preaching of this doctrine was no longer to be confined to the Jews. 2. That all things that were written in the books of the Prophets were accomplished in Jesus. 3. And therefore that, *through faith in his name*, every individual of that world which he came to save, should receive remission of sins. This great doctrine, like a rich vein of gold, runs through every discourse of the primitive Apostles, and its value may be estimated from its effect. "The word of God sent unto the children of Israel," is that which is sent also unto us; and which alone is able to reform and save a world dead in trespasses and sins, as it "preaches peace by Jesus Christ," that peace of soul, which arises through him whom we have every reason to acknowledge as *Lord of all*; for who but he, to whom that title peculiarly belongs, can soften the hardened and impenitent heart of man; who but he, could make a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole human race. Yet this he hath done, being *anointed* to his mediatorial office by the Holy Ghost, and shewing such signs and wonders, as none but those, from whose heart the veil is not yet removed, could resist. Of his resurrection, the test of all their principles, St. Peter acknowledges himself, and the other Apostles, as witnesses. Many were excluded from giving this testimony, because they were unworthy. "God raised him up the third day, and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God."

Which is truly the case still, for none can say that “Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost¹ ;” none can give evidence that they are the sons of God, but those who spiritually *eat and drink with him* now that he *is* risen from the dead ; as the Apostles actually did, before his ascension into heaven. Such only have the witness in themselves ; such only bear testimony to the Spirit of prophecy ; such only experience the blessed effects of the forgiveness of sins by that great and transcendent instance of divine goodness. “To him give all the Prophets witness ;” the whole scope of revelation rests in him ; and every branch of it proclaims and maintains this everlasting truth, that *through his name*, through those blessed means of salvation which his name implies, his merits and mediation, his grace and goodness, accompanied by the gifts of the Spirit, which bring with them repentance and obedience, all combined with, or depending upon, that one word *Faith*, “whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Such was the revelation first made to the Gentile world in the person of Cornelius, and his believing family. The importance of it brought a peculiar honour to the Apostle Peter, who was entrusted with the first commission. And when we recollect, that he was the first who offered the Gospel to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, as well as to the Gentiles, on this occasion, we shall,

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

perhaps, be inclined, with some interpreters¹, to attribute that address of our Lord, on the zealous character of this Apostle, with a reference to these circumstances: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church;” namely, on the united faith of the converted Jew and Gentile.

In consequence of this sermon, the extraordinary gifts and effusions of the Spirit were poured on the assembly. They spake new languages, and magnified God. St. Peter’s Jewish companions were astonished; but the Apostle proceeds to initiate them into their holy calling by the sacrament of baptism, a ceremony never omitted in the primitive Church; a proof that the ordinary gifts of the Spirit were not superseded, or rendered unnecessary, by his extraordinary effusions.

We may observe, by the way, too, that some distinctions in the ministerial offices appear to have existed even at this period; as it is said, Peter “*commanded*” them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” Others were deputed to complete the work, which the Apostle had begun.

In this lecture, my brethren, we have seen the door of salvation set open to us; and we are entreated, with more than common earnestness, to enter in. Let us not refuse the gracious invitation, but let us beseech the “Almighty God, who sheweth to them that be in error the light of his truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, that he would grant unto all

¹ Archbitharp Sharp, Vol. VII.

them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may renounce those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen ¹."

¹ Collect 3d Sunday after Easter.

LECTURE XII.

ACTS XI. XII. 1—23.

St. Peter's Defence of his conduct—Barnabas and Paul preach the Gospel one whole year at Antioch in Syria—Martyrdom of James, the brother of John—Imprisonment and deliverance of Peter—Death of Herod Agrippa. Jerusalem—Antioch—Jerusalem—Cæsarea. A. D. 41—44.

IN common life, when a person of superior attainments or abilities delivers new discoveries to the world, they are received at first with caution and distrust, if not with envy and ill-nature : afterwards, when time has made known their utility, or reason has more fully investigated, and given its sanction to their valuable properties, the tide of public favour returns upon the discoverer, and the effects of his wisdom are embraced with confidence and admiration. Such was the case with St. Peter, in consequence of the very extensive additions he was making to the Church, by the admission of Cornelius into it, as the first-fruits of the Gentile world; with this difference, indeed, that human inventions exhibit only the wisdom of men, but the new discoveries of the Apostle, on this occasion,

declare, in a peculiar manner, the revelation of the wisdom of God.

The fame of this innovation, as they thought it, reached the Apostles, and Brethren, while St. Peter still resided at Cæsarea. On his return to Jerusalem, he was called warmly to account for his conduct, by those who still retained the prejudices and rites of their old religion. So difficult is it even for good men, long accustomed to peculiar habits, to accommodate their minds to new principles, however beneficial. St. Peter's defence was vigorous and conclusive. He related his vision; and to shew that he could not be mistaken in the interpretation of it, he represents to them that, God had set his seal to it by an effusion of such spiritual gifts, as had borne witness to their own separation to the work of the ministry. "The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." "What then was I, that I could withstand God?" The argument was unanswerable; and, confirmed, as it was, at that time by six brethren, who had been eye-witnesses of the whole transaction, and had accompanied St. Peter to Jerusalem to bear this testimony, they acknowledged God's goodness in the event; they thankfully acquiesced in the declaration of this great extension of the Gospel, and said, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Here again appears that valuable doctrine, to which all the law and all the Gospel were subservient, *repentance unto life!* We find it in every discourse, and even in every incidental reflection,

introduced by St. Luke into his history of the Apostles' Acts. At the point of time in which we behold it here, it is indeed precious, as it extends its promises to us, who form a portion of those Gentiles, to whom our Almighty Father thus grants *repentance unto life*. He places us in a condition of salvation. He says, "This is the way, walk ye in it." *My grace is sufficient for thee*. Take it on those terms, and on those terms only, by which I offer it. Repentance unto life cannot but be highly acceptable to every sinner. We are all sinners; and therefore, as we hope for mercy in the hour of need, let us accept the condition, that we may receive the great, the invaluable benefit.

We may remember, that upon St. Stephen's death, a dispersion of the believers in Christ took place, which was attended with this happy circumstance, that they carried with them into various regions the important knowledge of the Gospel. The country of Phœnicia, the island of Cyprus, and Antioch, the very opulent and populous metropolis of Syria, received these holy emigrants, who propagated in those places, with indefatigable zeal, the evangelical doctrines, confining their preaching to the *Jewish converts only*. But when a part of these holy men, who were natives of Cyprus and Cyrene, came to Antioch, having been made well acquainted with the vision, and the consequent opinion and practice of St. Peter, they began to instruct the Grecians, that is, the devout Gentiles, also. The conversion of the Hellenists, or *Grecising Jews*, had been spoken of before.

St. Luke is now proceeding to a new period, or advance, in the first planting of the Gospel, and acquaints us with the reception of the *Judaizing Greeks*, as they may be called, the uncircumcised Gentiles, into the Church¹. The same blessed signs follow those that believe; “the hand of the Lord was with them.” The blessing of God always attends the true preaching of his word; and whether the holy dew fall in Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch, or Great Britain, *a great number will still believe; a great number will still continue to be turned to the Lord.*

The prosperous condition of the infant Church at Antioch, induced the council of Apostles, resident at Jerusalem, to send an assistant, fully competent, and commissioned to confirm them in the truth. The industry and integrity of Barnabas, and the eminent spiritual gifts which he possessed, occasioned him to be selected for this purpose. He was, besides, a native of Cyprus, a Gentile like themselves, and therefore it is probable would be most acceptable to persons of the same outward condition; and, what could not but recommend him above all to their attention and affection, he was a *son of consolation*, a humane compassionate man; he had an hand, and heart, ready to relieve every suffering fellow-creature; and accordingly, during the first exigency of the Church, as we have already seen, he had parted with valuable

¹ Benson's History of the first Planting of the Christian Religion, p. 246.

estates for this very purpose. If the temporal wants of others sat so warmly near his heart, what, may we imagine, was the case with their spiritual necessities? He hastened to Antioch; and when he found that the rumour of a new and holy society of believers, established in that city, had not been exaggerated; when he had *seen the grace of God*, the happy effects of God's sanctifying Spirit among them, their exemplary manners, their eminent faith, with all its precious fruits, *he was glad, and exhorted that, with purpose of heart*, with firm minds, unbiassed by fear or shame, by honour, or dishonour, by favour or persecution, not coldly or pretendedly, but sincerely, with hearts glowing with ardour and affection, they would remember whose they were, and whom they served, *and cleave unto the Lord*. And why was Barnabas thus animated in his master's service? Why did the appearance of this amiable society of believers thus rejoice his heart? The historian gives a beautiful and emphatic force to the expression—"for he was a good man." None but a truly good man can be susceptible of such pious and sympathetic feelings. He alone understands their value; and therefore, to become masters of this secret happiness, we must imitate his conduct. Barnabas was *a good man*; the definition of which character immediately follows—*full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith*. So far as the expression implies his *miraculous* gifts, we cannot follow his example; but in every other respect, he is a shining pattern.

It is not easy to define the exact meaning of

goodness. Neither is it necessary, as every man's conscience will be his best interpreter. The wicked man knows that it is something which he does *not* possess; the lukewarm Christian is sensible that he *dares not* claim it; the well-disposed looks forward to it as a great object of his desire; but he alone, who acts under the constant influence and impression of God's sanctifying and redeeming grace, can, like Barnabas, either feel or receive such a blessed attestation of his *goodness*; "for the fruit of the Spirit, as St. Paul observes, is in all *goodness*, and righteousness, and truth ¹."

The harvest was plentiful, but the labourers were few; and therefore the indefatigable Barnabas, hearing that St. Paul was at his native city Tarsus, went thither to request his assistance in the conversion of the devout Gentiles, and brought him with him to Antioch. Here they resided together one whole year ², and happy was the result of their united labours. "They assembled themselves with (or in ³) the Church, and taught *much* people;" and at this place the believers of the Gospel had the peculiar honour of being first distinguished by the title of CHRISTIANS.

"Christian!"—in the language of a religious poet ⁴, "Christian is the highest style of man!" and it is probable was attributed to the general society of believers by the highest authority. The disciples were called, as it were, by divine proclamation or admonition, Christians ⁵. The period

¹ Ephes. v. 9.

² A. D. 42.

³ Εν τη εκκλησιᾳ.

⁴ Young's Night Thoughts.

⁵ See Benson, p. 248.

too when this appellation was given to the faithful, is worthy of observation. They could no longer with propriety be called Nazarenes, or Galileans, or even by any more general name of a local nature, as none could now be applicable to the whole body of believers. Jew and Gentile were now reconciled in Christ. What title therefore could be more appropriate to *every* Church, which was then, or should afterwards be established in the world, than that derived from *Him*, the great founder of our faith, “whose name only is excellent in all the earth;” for “this is the name by which he shall be called, the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS¹?”

The consideration of this high distinctive title should have the greatest influence on the minds of all those who bear it. The graces which the true possession of it conveys, and the inestimable privileges which it implies, elevate the human soul, and stamp a value upon creation itself. This topic would alone fill volumes to enlarge on all the qualities it describes. But if there be any who—“the blessed cross wipes off, as a foul blot, from his dishonoured brow”—let him tremble at the invaluable blessing he renounces. By baptism he was made a *member of Christ*, purged of the original defilements of his nature, and placed in a capacity of salvation. If he reject so enviable a condition, what can he expect but to be left to the miserable consequences of that state which he prefers, and

¹ Jer. xxiii. 6.

that “in the greatness of his folly” he should be permitted to *go astray*?

Let us use this happy title as a mean of grace to keep us in our duty. And when we are tempted by evil men, or evil inclinations, to forsake the God of our fathers, and seek after idols that are but vanity, *let us remember that we are* CHRISTIANS. When we find unreasonable and deceitful wishes springing up within us, and seducing us, with false promises of joy, to cling with greater earnestness to all the deluding pleasures of the world, *let us remember that we are* CHRISTIANS. When we find malignant passions getting the mastery over us, and envy, ill-will, personal resentment, or revenge, subduing, with dreadful ravages, our reason and our religion, *let us remember that we are* CHRISTIANS. When the soft and flowery paths of prosperity entice our careless steps to stray, and “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life¹,” drag us towards a dreadful and a dangerous gulf, *let us remember that we are* CHRISTIANS. Such a timely remembrance, by God’s grace, may redeem us from the very jaws and pit of destruction. Neither let us want the sanction of this sacred name when we are overwhelmed with sorrow and affliction. Is there any widow or orphan who does not receive it as a cordial to their drooping spirits? Is there any truly penitent heart, any dejected servant of his Saviour, who does not

¹ 1 John ii. 16.

live again at the name of Christ? As this great and glorious name is the staff and maintenance of the good man's *life*, so is it in a peculiar manner the comfort and consolation of his *death*. In that trying hour, call over him the *name of Christ*, and, through faith in the precious promises of his Redeemer, will not every pain subside, and every agony be subdued? So important is it, that all who are distinguished by this holy name, should know and *feel* the value of being called CHRISTIANS.

During the first establishment of the Church at Antioch, there are other circumstances worthy of observation. These holy Christians were visited not only by Apostles, but *Prophets* from Jerusalem. In enumerating the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, we are told that they were of different kinds in the primitive Church. "He gave some Apostles," says St. Paul, "and some *Prophets*, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers¹." Each had his peculiar gift to which in general he was restrained; though the purpose of instruction, according to the intention of the gift, appears to have been common to them all. Thus St. Luke was an Evangelist, but no Prophet; and Agabus, who was one of the visitors on this occasion from Jerusalem, was a Prophet, but no Evangelist. For "to every one was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ²."

While the brethren were assembled, probably for public worship (and the author of this history,

¹ Ephes. iv. 11.

² Ibid. iv. 7.

whose native place was Antioch, as it has been thought ¹ among them) Agabus stood up in the midst of them, and by an immediate revelation from the Spirit, informed them, that before many years were expired, there should be a great famine *throughout all the world*, that is, according to a phrase well understood, throughout all Judæa; a circumstance which is known to have taken place in the fourth or fifth years of the Emperor Claudius Cæsar, about two years after the prediction. Thus profane history again corroborates the sacred. And the contributions expressly made at Antioch for the relief of the brethren in Jerusalem and Judæa, at the same time that they were calculated to conciliate the favour of the native Jews towards their new associates, the converted Gentiles, became also an argument for their common religion. These contributions were sent to the elders, or presbyters, of the several Christian Churches, by the safe and conscientious hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This is the first passage in which the word *elder* or *presbyter* occurs, and requires a short explanation. From *old men* being most capable, from judgment and experience, to command, it has been adopted, both in ancient and modern languages, for *rulers*. Thus the principal governors of Rome were called *Senators*; the municipal magistrate is generally termed Mayor, that is, *Major*; and his associates, Aldermen, or *Elder-men*. In the New

¹ See Benson, p. 250.

Testament the appellation will frequently be found, and signifies the Governors, or Bishops, of the Christian Church. The original establishment of every Christian Church consisted in an assembly of ecclesiastical persons, from them designated the *Presbytery*¹. The members of this body, as they were distinguished from the Deacons in office, were soon also separated, for the sake of Church government, by another distinction. Hence arose the order of Presbyters, or Priests, in the modern sense of the word, as an intermediate order between that of Bishops and Deacons. The names indeed of these alone, frequently occur together, both in the book of Acts, and in the Epistles; nor is it clearly understood when the arrangement, as it now stands, took place. The earliest state of the Church did not require it, for the Presbyters, in the sense of Bishops, were fully sufficient for its management. Every Church had its Bishop, and every Bishop was assisted by his Deacons. Whatever date, therefore, we fix to the institution of Presbyters with Bishops and Deacons, it appears to have been fully established before the conclusion of the Apostolic age. “The Apostles,” says the judicious Hooker, “being Bishops at large, ordained every where Presbyters. Titus and Timothy having received episcopal power, as Apostolic ambassadors or legates, the one in Greece, the other in Ephesus, they both did, by virtue thereof, likewise ordain throughout all Churches,

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

Deacons and Presbyters within the circuits allotted unto them¹." I have only to observe further, that the Church of England has been established upon this primitive model. When she found it necessary to leave the communion of the Church of Rome, on account of her many corruptions, she did not think herself at liberty to found a new Church government, as had been the case in some countries, and is now practised by other religious sects amongst ourselves; but she took the earliest inspired history of the Christian Church for her guide, and the earliest ecclesiastical writers for her advisers; and she is, what we now see her, pure in her doctrines, simple in her discipline. Were we all, both ecclesiastical and civil, by our conduct and behaviour, as ready to do her justice, as she is to purify and reform us, we should then have "a glorious Church" indeed, resembling the venerable parent of all Churches, "not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish²."

While outward tranquillity and inward peace through the Spirit were increasing the number of believers at Antioch, a new persecution presented itself before those at Jerusalem. The name of Herod is justly execrated by every friend of Jesus. Agrippa, a grandson of the cruel king of that name, and so called by St. Luke, had lately returned from Rome, where, by many insidious and insinuating arts, he had obtained from the reigning Emperor, a part of the territories of his family;

¹ Eccl. Pol. B. 7.

² Ephes. v. 27.

and at this time, not out of any conscientious regard to his religion, though even that would have been no apology for his cruelty, but merely to gratify the malignity of his new subjects against the Christians, he suffered several holy members of the Church to be severely treated, under the sanction of his authority. Among other instances, it is related, in few words, “ he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.” Thus fell the first martyr among the Apostles of our Lord ; of whom he had said, “ You shall indeed drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ¹.” The account is short of this good martyr’s death. And how many good men, unnoticed, almost unlamented, fall into a quiet grave ! Happy they who depart in peace ! Partakers of their blessed Saviour’s cup, they wish to drink it to the dregs ; and having done this, they lay their heads upon the silent turf, and say, “ I lay me down in peace,”—their eyes open in heaven.

That God should remove early from the earth many virtuous and good men, before they have apparently fulfilled their allotted station in the world, and even in the midst of their usefulness, is a mystery which we know not now, but we shall know hereafter. God is master of his own instruments ; and we are to be taught by every expression of his will—“ This is thy hand, and thou, Lord, hast

¹ Matt. xx. 22.

done it." With respect to the religious sufferer, his reward is with him ; and to those who remain, a further, and perhaps severer, trial of their faith is expected. But to both—" the Lord is just in all his works, and holy in all his ways ¹."

In the course of Providence, " two shall be in one bed, the one shall be taken, and the other left ²." Thus did St. James suffer, whilst St. Peter was miraculously preserved. " Because he saw it pleased the Jews, this accommodating monarch proceeded further, to take Peter also." The warm zeal of the Apostle probably occasioned him, at this time, to be a marked object of popular resentment. The narrative of St. Peter's imprisonment and release, is extremely interesting. The officers remembered perhaps the unaccountable deliverance of the Apostles from prison on a former occasion, and therefore they now place an extraordinary guard over Peter. Four quaternions, or sixteen soldiers, are appointed to secure him. To two of them, in turn, he was chained by the hands, whilst a party of the others guarded the entrance of the prison. Nothing less than an heinous offence could warrant such extraordinary care. But no such attached itself to Peter. If peculiar energy in his Master's service, indeed, constituted such a crime, he was the most offending man alive. This it was which brought him to a prison, and rivetted the fetters on his hands. In this situation, his enemies

¹ Psalm cxlv. 17.

² Luke xvii. 34.

imagined that their prisoner, whom they had sentenced to death, as soon as the passover should be ended, could not possibly escape. But *that* opened the prison door, which opens the gates of heaven itself.

“ Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.” How consolatory to the afflicted, to be assured that he is allowed access unto the Father, through the prayer of faith ! The valuable life, in danger of being lost for ever to the world, is granted to the earnest supplication of the *whole Christian Church*. Prayer is a never-failing and comfortable resort ; and when the matter of our reasonable petitions is not complied with, it is certain that God has some further beneficial ends to be answered by it, unknown to the weak, and imperfect senses of mere human nature. While his friends were thus piously employed, on the evening before his expected execution, the Apostle was enjoying the peaceful slumbers of a good man, chained, as he was, to two attendants. Such is the security of innocence, and the blessed fruits of faith, even in a moment of the most imminent danger ! The appearance of the angel, illuminating, by a cheering light, the darkness of the dungeon, the Apostle’s sudden release from galling fetters, the animating voice of his heavenly conductor, the safety with which he passed through two courts of the prison, the wonderful manner by which the massy iron gate was opened, impressed on the Apostle’s mind an imagination that he had seen a vision ; but when the angel departed from him,

after having led him through one street on his way to a place of refuge (implying, that the extraordinary assistance of God is not to be expected, when ordinary exertions will accomplish the same purpose) he then found that this was no vision, but an immediate interposition of Divine Providence in his favour.

The first use St. Peter made of his liberty, after acknowledging God's goodness on the very spot where the angel left him, was to resort to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, (afterwards St. Paul's companion, and a writer of one of the Gospels) where several holy members of the Church were assembled together in prayer for his deliverance. The damsel who attended his summons at the gate, surprised at hearing Peter's voice, by a very natural expression of joy, which for a moment took away the recollection of his danger, ran back to acquaint his friends with his arrival, without having first admitted him into the house. His friends disputed the intelligence, and said, "It is his angel¹." But the doubt is soon cleared up; and the Apostle himself communicates to the assembly the whole circumstance of his miraculous preservation. Then desiring them to acquaint his kinsman James, Bishop of

¹ Some commentators imagine, the expression signifies *his guardian angel*; others (as Dr. Waterland, Serm. vol. ii. p. 90,) it is his *ghost*, or separate spirit; for "they had reason to believe that he had been *executed* by that time." Sometimes it has been interpreted, a messenger from the prison.

Jerusalem, and the other brethren, with these transactions, he departs, most probably, to a place of greater security.

The cruelty of Herod now fell upon St. Peter's guards, whom he put to death for a supposed negligence of their charge. The justice of God cannot be impeached for the execution of these soldiers. It is consistent with what happens daily in the world. Punishment assuredly follows the commission of sin, (unless we receive pardon through the grace of repentance) though perhaps neither at the time, nor in the manner, we expect. If we continue in sin, because "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily¹," let us remember, that a day of recompence will come, when we are least prepared for its reception.

Even Herod himself, at no distant period of time, became a striking instance of a similar judgment. We have seen in this lecture the severity of his conduct towards the Christians, and we also learn that his moral character wanted that stability which would recommend it to heathens themselves; although his deference to the multitude had procured him popular favour, and his duplicity and servility had put him in possession of a kingdom. We now behold him leaving Jerusalem, and fixing his residence at Cæsarea, the chief seat of Roman power. At this place he had instituted public games, as an occasional festival in honour of the Emperor; and at the same time and place he pro-

¹ Eccles. viii. 11.

posed to celebrate the peace which he had just made, with the neighbouring states of Tyre and Sidon. The concourse was great. The scene was awful. The relation of this event by St. Luke is wonderfully confirmed by the account which is given of it in the celebrated history of the Jews. The unpremeditated coincidence of the Christian and Jewish historians, will be considered as adding particular authenticity to both. Josephus says, that Agrippa “ went to Cæsarea, and that there, upon a day of public festivity, which had been instituted in honour of Cæsar, and at which a great company of his nobles, and principal officers, were present, he went to the theatre, dressed in a robe of silver, of most curious workmanship. The rays of the rising sun, reflected from such a splendid garb, gave him a majestic and awful appearance. Upon which they gave a shout, calling him a god, and praying him to be propitious to them. This impious flattery, he neither reprovèd nor restrained. Before he left the assembly, he was smitten with the most exquisite inward pains. Then turning his eyes upon his friends, he said, ‘ Behold, I, whom ye so lately addressed as a deity, am now called upon to give up my life : invincible necessity convicts your acclamations of falsehood ; and I, whom you hailed immortal, am suddenly snatched away to death ; but such is the will of God.’ His pains increased, and, in five days, put an end to his life ¹.” “ Immediately,” says St. Luke,

¹ Jos. Antiq. l. 19. c. 8. § 2.

“ the angel of God smote him ;” the swift-winged messenger of heaven attended the summons of the Almighty, “ *because he gave not God the glory, and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*” A circumstance not mentioned by Josephus, but arising doubtless (being judicially smitten) from the nature of his disorder, of which more than one instance will be found in history.

An awful intimation of divine vengeance appears here before us. We were made acquainted with the crime, and we have beheld the blow. But let none of us imagine, that because the offender was great, and the offence dreadful, that we are unconcerned in the warning that is given. The commission of sin is universal, and he who calls himself most innocent offends daily. From guilty thoughts, guilty words, and guilty actions, none of us are exempt. Every bodily disease, whatever we may think, is given to correct them. And though it may not always appear in so visible and tremendous a manner, as in the case of Herod, yet we are always called upon to make the application to ourselves. Death itself is the consequence of sin ; and when submitted to as a sacrifice for sin, on Christian motives, will be mercifully accepted as a mean of salvation, through the more perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. The sudden easy dissolution of a good man bears no analogy to the immediate infliction of divine indignation ; any further, than that he, as well as all mankind, pays the allotted *penalty* of Adam.

“ When the judgments of the Lord are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness ¹. ”

¹ Isai. xxvi. 9.

LECTURE XIII.

ACTS XII. 24. XIII. 1—41.

Special ordination of Barnabas and Saul—Paul's first apostolic journey with Barnabas to convert the Gentiles. Antioch—Seleucia—Cyprus—Salamis and Paphos—Pamphilia—Perga—Antioch in Pisidia. A.D. 45.

THE progress of the Gospel is compared, by an elegant allusion of our Saviour, to the growth and maturity of a plant. As we pursue the early history of the Church, we find the truth of the comparison wonderfully, and emphatically, confirmed. The dews of heaven, emblematic of divine grace, nourish and refresh the seed, whilst the spiritual husbandmen, under the same influence, industriously cultivate the soil. May all those, peculiarly distinguished as the servants of such a master, remember their important charge, and be always ready to complete his work!

Notwithstanding the persecution of Herod, as related in my last lecture, “the word of God grew and multiplied.” The very methods used for its destruction proved the means of its preservation and prosperity. The particular interposition of

Providence in the deliverance of Peter, and the punishment of his oppressor, must have cherished the faith, and revived the confidence of the early Christians. We seldom hear of any great calamity having befallen the Church, or the serious persecution of any of her more eminent members, but the spirit of religion seems to gain greater strength among them, and the repeated language of the sacred historian is—"the word of God grew, and multiplied!"

St. Luke now recurs to the mission of Barnabas and Saul, who had been sent from Antioch with alms for the relief of the brethren in Judea. These faithful messengers having fulfilled the object of their journey, return again to their charge, and bring with them a new associate, John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, at the house of whose mother, St. Peter had found an asylum.

During the period that St. Paul had now spent at Jerusalem, that singular trance, or extasy, which he mentions in his second Epistle to the Corinthians ¹, is by some learned men supposed to have taken place. Others have placed it at Lystra, at Antioch, and, with less reason, at Damascus, soon after his conversion. But if that Epistle was written, as it is generally imagined, in the year 58, fourteen years backward from that time will direct us to the year 44, near the exact period at which we are now arrived ².

¹ Chap. xii.

² The marginal reference of our Bible dates the Ep. 60, and the transaction at Lystra, A. D. 46.

No inferior member of the Church of Christ had as yet undertaken to ordain any to the high office of the Apostleship, which, as I have before remarked, was the foundation of episcopal authority. The successors of the Apostles were constituted by themselves, through the power originally bestowed upon them by their Master; and we know not, in the early Apostolic times, that this power was ever violated. A miraculous interposition, it will be allowed, forms no exception to the rule. But even here, a man's own evidence was not of itself considered as a sufficient proof of his appointment. He was expected to display the usual Apostolic gifts. "If I bear witness of myself (said our Lord) my witness is not true¹," is not corresponding with that evidence which is required as the proof of human testimony. "*The works which I do*," the miracles which I perform, "they bear witness of me." In the trance which St. Paul had in the temple, or indeed wherever it happened, we have reason to imagine, that he was endowed with these spiritual proofs of his mission to the Gentiles; and for any thing we know to the contrary, the same might have been the case with Barnabas, as he was sent with him to this important work². Yet notwithstanding this, neither Paul nor Barnabas thought himself at liberty to go forth on a new appointment to preach the Gospel, not merely to the Jewish Proselytes and con-

¹ John v. 31.

² Benson's History of Christianity, Vol. II. p. 3.

verted Jews (for the former had been already done in consequence of St. Peter's vision) but on a new mission, which had not yet been suggested to any of the Apostles—to men of *all* countries, and of *all* religious persuasions, heathens, idolaters, as well as to all those (if such there were) who acknowledged no supreme ruler of the universe at all, without a more public call from the Church to which they belonged.

In many parts of St. Paul's writings he refers to the immediate revelations which he had to direct him in his preaching, and particularly to the injunction to preach the Gospel to the heathen. In his speech to the Jewish people from the stairs of the tower of Antonia, he informs them that he had been enjoined in a vision (most probably in the trance which, we presume, he had at this period) to "depart," for he should be sent "*far hence,*" far from Jerusalem, where he then was, "*unto the Gentiles.*" And repeatedly he says, that he "received of the Lord that which he delivered ¹;" that he was an Apostle "*not of men, neither by men,*" but by "*Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ².*" Had he, therefore, at this time received his full ordination from *Simeon*, and *Lucius*, and *Manaen*, "prophets and teachers," as we are told, in the Church which was at Antioch, but certainly not men of Apostolic authority, upon their own suggestion, the circumstance would have contradicted the assertions of St. Paul. But this

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 23.

² Gal. i. 1.

was not the case. And the express revelation of the Spirit, at the time that Barnabas and Saul received this special ordination, reconciles and illustrates the whole transaction. "As they ministered to the Lord, *the Holy Ghost* said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto *I have called them*; not *whereunto I now call them*, but *I have called them*; certainly by a previous revelation, otherwise no distinction would have been made between their *new* mission to the Gentiles, and that which had been before undertaken by the other Apostles to the converted Jews, and Jewish proselytes only.

The solemnity of this religious rite has become the model of all future ordinations in the Church. *Prayer, fasting*, (not a superstitious abstinence, but a forbearance from such excess of food, or pleasures, as may withdraw the mind from its proper duties) and *imposition of hands*; not only of those from whom all ecclesiastical authority is derived, but of those also whose peculiar duty it is to bless the people¹, is a reasonable and pious mode of ordaining persons to the arduous and important office of the ministry.

"Go and make disciples of *all nations*," is the first foundation of Apostolic ordination. Through every successive age has this power been continued, however it may have been misconceived in some of

¹ "The Bishop, *with the Priests present*, shall lay their hands severally upon the head of every one that receiveth the order of Priesthood." Ordination Service.

the later eras of the Church. And though we see the sacred order sometimes degraded by the bad conduct of some *individuals*, who forget the rock from whence they are hewn, and the obligations which they have laid upon themselves; and sometimes ridiculed by others, who have formed low and unworthy notions of this holy profession, totally ignorant of its divine original, and wilfully deriding an institution which opposes all their corrupt and sinful inclinations; yet resting, as it does, on the word and veracity of God, however contemned, it cannot lose its value; however oppressed, it can never be overthrown; but to the end of the world it will continue to produce some bright and shining characters to stand in the gap, and boldly bear the banner of their heavenly Master.

¹ We now enter upon the first Apostolic journey² of St. Paul, as the great teacher of the Gentiles; accompanied, on this occasion, by his very worthy coadjutor Barnabas, and John Mark, whom they had brought with them from Jerusalem as an assistant. St. Luke's narrative of this important

¹ A. D. 45.

² Different commentators have divided the history of St. Paul's life into different peregrinations, or journeys; some beginning from Jerusalem, others from Antioch in Syria. All these tend greatly to the elucidation of the narrative. In detailing the journeys, properly called *Apostolic*, the writer has followed Dr. Benson's arrangement, in consideration that the former was the metropolis of Jewish converts, as the latter was of converted Gentiles; and therefore as our great Apostle was decidedly *the Apostle of the Gentiles*, he considers him as setting forward in his *extraordinary mission* from the latter place.

journey is very concise, and a few only of the many incidents which occurred are related. This, however to be regretted, is consistent with the whole of the history of the Acts of the Apostles, which was not undertaken as a complete account of every circumstance which attended the first planting of the Gospel, but only of such select passages as the author had either been an eye-witness of, or was able fully to authenticate from the relation of others. Though some particulars mentioned in St. Paul's Epistles will not be found in St. Luke's history of him, yet in others, there is the most perfect coincidence ; a circumstance which takes away all suspicion of collusion in either party ; and as the Epistles and the Acts were composed at different times, and by different authors, and no contradiction discovered even in the relation of the same event, we cannot but consider this as a strong argument for the veracity of both ¹.

The Church of Antioch, after bestowing its solemn benediction on this sacred mission, dismissed Barnabas and Saul to the great work to which they were called ; and lest there should be any misinterpretation of their divine commission, the inspired historian gives this account of their departure : “ so they, *being sent forth by the Holy Ghost*, departed.”

The first resting-place of the two Apostles, but probably for no long time, was at Seleucia, a city situated fifteen miles below Antioch, on the same

¹ See Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

river, Orontes, and not far from its entrance into that portion of the Mediterranean Sea, now called the Levant. They fixed upon Seleucia as a convenient port, from whence they might more easily embark for the island of Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas, and where they had reason to expect a kind reception from the Jewish proselytes, some of whom had visited, and probably joined themselves to, the society of Christians at Antioch. They landed at Salamis, a considerable city on the eastern side of the island, and preached the Gospel, doubtless with good success, as we read of no persecutions here in the synagogues of the Jews. From thence they continued their valuable travels through the centre of the island, till they reached the celebrated city of Paphos on the southern coast. This place, in ancient days, was rendered infamously illustrious by the worship of the Cyprian Venus.

To attack vice in its strongest hold, and under its most alluring appearances, is becoming that religion which was expressly delivered to purify the heart. “Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul¹.” “Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a *pure heart*².” In every age has the sin here alluded to attached itself closely to the human heart; in every age have the great and mighty fallen sacrifices before this altar. Even this age, which we call enlightened

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 11.

² 2 Tim. ii. 22.

has much to answer for on this head. And when we see the representative of a goddess, call her a *goddess of Reason*, or by any other name, set up in a Christian temple, let the horror excited by the circumstance prevent us from falling into the same idolatry. Let us guard against our vicious propensities, whatever they may be ; as they are generally attended with this fatal consequence, that they shut our eyes against the danger of our situation ; and whilst we acknowledge ourselves servants of the immaculate Jesus, and profess *with our mind to serve the law of God*, we become worshippers at a different shrine, and *with the flesh serve the law of sin*. Solomon forsook his *wisdom*, and was drawn into idolatry by his *strange wives* ¹. But the case of those is still more deplorable, who, under the impression of the purest and clearest revelation that was ever made to man, are so indifferently affected towards the true faith, that they renounce all religious scruples upon this subject, and offer deceitful incense to the great object of this degrading worship. “ The lips of a strange woman drop as an honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil. But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword ². Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded ; yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death ³.”

¹ 1 Kings xi. 4, 8.

² Prov. v. 3, 4.

³ Prov. vii. 25, 26, 27.

On account of the general licentiousness of the inhabitants, the city of Paphos offered itself as a proper scene for the zealous labours of Barnabas and Saul. The providence of God, indeed, had prepared the way before them; for Sergius Paulus, the Roman Proconsul, who resided at this place, possessing a natural disposition desirous of instruction, sends for the Apostles, that they might communicate to him that *word of God* which they were delivering to the people. As Cornelius had been the first Roman to whom the doctrines of Christ had been preached as *a proselyte of the Jews* so Sergius Paulus, under nearly the same circumstances, was the first of his nation *professedly* a worshipper of idols, to whom the same Gospel was sent. In his household we find settled, a celebrated magician, whose arts no doubt contributed to deceive his master; and for some time he was successful in his endeavours to *withstand* the heavenly doctrines of the inspired Apostles.

How greatly should we beware of the seductions of a *false friend*! To serve the vilest purposes, he casts a mist before the eyes, and every object he presents before them is beheld through the medium of prejudice. It is his business to misrepresent the fairest appearances. He dresses vice in the simple robes of virtue. He calls the arts of *magic*, the arts of superstition, or any other arts, *religion*, that he may the more easily, as in this case, “turn away the deputy from the true faith.” I say not this to increase suspicion, but to excite watchfulness. The man of pleasure is in this situation,

when he becomes the instrument of seduction to his gay and unsuspecting associates. The sceptical philosopher acts the same part when he seizes upon the ingenuous and unguarded mind of youth, and insinuates his false and most destructive principles. *Beware of such friends.* But though the seducer justly merits condemnation, let not the seduced imagine that he shall escape censure. Whatever crime attaches itself to the tempter, he who falls by temptation is a partaker of his guilt, and shall bear his own punishment. It is no apology for the sinner that he does not feel the heinous nature of sin, when he resists the warning voice, and offends against conviction.

Happily for the proconsul of Cyprus, he was rescued from the dangerous suggestions of the magician Barjesus by the noble deportment of St. Paul, and by means of the first miracle which he wrought under the influence of his Apostolic gifts. Being endowed with the faculty of *discerning of spirits*, he *set his eyes* stedfastly on the impostor; he looked with that commanding countenance, before which the most hardened guilt trembles with apprehension; and said, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." The punishment bore some resem-

blance to the fault. The eyes of the body were deprived of the glorious light of the sun, because the eye of the mind had closed itself in voluntary darkness, and had spread abroad that darkness by the vilest arts of deception.

Does not this instance of divine indignation impress itself strongly on our hearts? If we have not deceived others, have we not often deceived ourselves? Have we not sought for pretences for evading the truths of the Gospel, which we could not but fully understand? Have we not justified such conduct, as, in more serious moments, we could not but abhor? On this occasion how merciful was God! He did not, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, strike the offender dead upon the spot; he did not even condemn him to *perpetual* blindness. “Thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun *for a season*.” The sorcerer’s own conversion for any thing that appears, might be involved in his temporary punishment. Happy is it for all sinners, if their sin, or the recompence for their sin, should be only *for a season*. But let us not continue in so hazardous a situation under such an expectation. It is mercy, and mercy only, that can save us from final destruction. If we have grace enough in a state of judicial darkness to go about, like Elymas, *seeking some to lead us by the hand*, we may hope that, through the same grace, the sentence may be removed, and we may behold “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world¹.”

¹ John i. 9.

The conversion of the proconsul was the immediate effect of this miracle—"when he saw what was done he believed;" the eyes of his mind were opened at the same moment that the bodily sight of his favourite counsellor was taken from him. His escape was narrow; and offers a strong matter of instruction to all those, who, like him, perhaps, are desirous of *hearing the word of God*, who even sends for a Barnabas or a Saul to explain it, who from agreeable companions, and the occasional perusal of good books, think themselves in the way of salvation. Then steps in "a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew," and whether named *Barjesus*, or not, a seducer—and, under some insinuating form, persuades them to resist, what he calls the *severe* duties of religion, and follows a smoother path; he recommends a faith which requires something less than the possession of the *whole* heart; one, which is compatible with pleasure in all her various attires; one, which accommodates itself to the continued accumulation of riches; and imagines that the mind *sometimes* sent to heaven, will answer every purpose of devotion, and secure a seat in that place which they hope one day to attain. I need not add, that under these circumstances, vain will be their expectation. Let them look earnestly at the conduct of Sergius Paulus. A moment of reflection on the visible interposition of Providence, and a serious conviction of its truth, under the grace of God, did more for him than his naturally good disposition. "He believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

From this period the great Apostle of the Gentiles is distinguished only by the name of Paul; "then Saul, who is also called Paul," says St. Luke. The more general opinion is, that he bore originally both these names; the former being a Jewish, the latter a Roman name; his parents were also Roman citizens resident at Tarsus. While he continued preaching among the Jews only, the historian calls him Saul, but after his Apostolic mission to convert the Gentiles, and particularly the inhabitants of countries subject to the Roman government, he is distinguished by the latter appellation, which, for the future, takes the precedence in the narrative.

From Paphos the Apostles went by sea to Perga, a sea-port town on the continent of Asia Minor, in the province of Pamphilia; and from hence their young attendant, John Mark, deterred, it may be, by the prospect of approaching dangers, (for his conduct on this occasion did not meet with the concurrence of St. Paul, whose warm and honest heart could not bear the thought of turning back his hand from the plough) returned to Jerusalem. Let the marked disapprobation of the Apostle make a deep impression on every weak and irresolute mind. We may not all perhaps be endued with the noble intrepidity of a Paul, we may not possess that heroic greatness of mind which we admire in the teacher of the Gentiles, but he, whose faith is fixed upon the same rock, whose eye beholds the same Saviour, and looks forward to the same reward, will feel an elevation of soul which he hardly

expected within his own breast, and will experience a support which will protect him in danger, cherish him in trouble, and carry him to the footstool of Him who is higher than the highest.

Paul and Barnabas, after landing at Perga, and no doubt taking every opportunity to fulfil their important mission, proceeded up the country to the city of Antioch, in the province of Pisidia, which we must carefully distinguish from Antioch in Syria, the city from whence they set forward on this journey.

On their arrival at Antioch, they went into the Jewish Synagogue, not only as a place of public worship, where they were certain to hear several edifying passages of the law and the prophets recited, but where they might find occasion, as it actually happened, to promulgate the still more edifying doctrines of the Gospel. Being seated in the synagogue, the ruler of it sent to request, that if they had any profitable instruction to communicate to the people, they might make use of this opportunity. This permission might arise, either from custom, or from some prepossession in favour of the Apostles, whose fame had probably preceded them to Antioch. Upon this St. Paul arose, and beckoning with his hand to solicit attention, with great energy of language addressed a most attentive assembly. "Ye men of Israel, (ye native Jews, regular descendants of the patriarchs) and ye that fear God, (religious proselytes) give audience!" — This discourse affords an high and accurate notion of St. Paul's preaching. He is

addressing those who were believers of the Jewish law, and therefore founds his argument in the early history of their nation, as St. Peter and St. Stephen, for the same reason, had done before him. From the tendency of the Jewish dispensation, and the express language of their Prophets, he deduces the necessary and actual appearance of the Saviour Jesus. “Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God (that is, native Jews and devout Gentiles) to you is the word of this salvation sent;” an expression according with our Saviour’s own declaration, that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among *all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem.” A summary of our Lord’s death and resurrection is next recited, and a suitable application made. Then follows the grand conclusion to which both the law and the prophets had only been preparatory. “Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” The justification of man by the faith of Christ, in opposition to the *works of the law*, or any human works, is the doctrine of St. Paul, and the true doctrine of the Church. “By Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Neither the purifications of the Jewish law, nor the merits of man, however applied, will be effectual to man’s salvation. The one may be preparatory to that happy state, and the other a genuine fruit of faith; but,

as a meritorious cause, we *must* rest solely on the sacrifice of Christ. “The law made nothing perfect, but it was the bringing in of a better *hope*¹.” *Therefore*, the same Apostle says in another place, “a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law² ;” a faith productive of every blessed, every sanctifying grace. The Apostle concludes this discourse with a solemn warning taken from one of their own prophets, and calculated to make a deep impression on their minds. “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish ; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you³ ;” though it be laid before you in the plainest manner, supported by the clearest and most uncontrovertible evidence.

This passage evidently refers to the approaching ruin of the Jewish people ; and the solemn admonition leads to this important conclusion, that the only way by which a Jew might secure himself from being involved in this national evil, was by embracing Christianity. This indeed is the way, the only way by which all temporal evils may be avoided ; at least it is the way by which they may be converted to real and substantial blessings.

Happy shall we be if the application of this passage does not rest upon ourselves ! for though the Jewish veil may not be upon our hearts, yet the darkness of iniquity, and the impenetrable darkness of infidelity, may spread themselves over many

¹ Heb. vii. 19² Rom. iii. 28.³ Is. xxviii. 14.

souls, even in the brightest region of the sun of righteousness. That this may not be our case, let us pray, in the language of our liturgy, that "God, who did teach the hearts of his faithful people, by sending them the light of his Holy Spirit, would grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen¹."

¹ Collect for Whitsunday.

LECTURE XIV.

ACTS XIII. 42. CHAP. XIV.

Paul's first Apostolic Journey with Barnabas concluded. Antioch in Pisidia.—Iconium.—Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia.—Return by Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Perga through Attalia, to Antioch in Syria. A. D. 45, 46.

It may be remembered, that we have accompanied the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and his companion Barnabas, as far as Antioch in Pisidia, in their journey to convert the idolatrous nations. Let us pursue these eminent travellers, not merely as spectators of their progress, but as interested in their success. Had not the zealous and intrepid Paul obeyed the heavenly mandate, and carried the sound of the Gospel even beyond the confines, as it is supposed, of the then civilized world, what, probably, at this moment, would have been the state of Britain? Had natural religion then given us what was most valuable in society? Or had the cruelties and severities of the Druids taught us tenderness and mercy? What was this island, but forlorn and uncultivated? What were the islanders, but rude and savage? It was the introduction of Christianity which paved the way for every

blessing. And every real blessing, national and individual, we shall assuredly receive, if we accept and transmit, from age to age, that inestimable Christianity which St. Paul preached.

The discourse which St. Paul delivered in the Synagogue at Antioch, was fully calculated to effect these important purposes. When the Jews had left the Synagogue, the devout Gentiles, delighted with what they had heard, intreated the Apostles to repeat these heavenly doctrines before the next Sabbath, between this Sabbath and the next. Several, it appears, were now converted; as we are told that Paul and Barnabas, after the congregation was broken up, particularly addressed "many of the Jews, and religious proselytes, and persuaded them to *continue* in the grace of God," to persevere in the profession of the true faith, which they had just accepted.

So popular was St. Paul's eloquence, so impressive and convincing the joyful tidings which he brought, that "almost the whole city came together the next Sabbath to hear the word of God." No wonder that all, even idolatrous nations, should be so ready to hearken to a message so new, so unexpected, so salutary to them. Buried, as they were, in a system of belief, incomprehensible in itself, and despised by the wisest of their philosophers, their conduct on this occasion at least merits some applause, as they were willing to place themselves in the way of instruction, and to listen to new truths which might prove beneficial to them. Will not such heathens rise up in judgment against

those nominal Christians, who, in the midst of a blaze of light, are contented to walk in darkness? Will not that numerous congregation of idolaters, as well as devout, that is, converted Gentiles (proselytes) amounting almost to the whole population of the city, put to shame the many thousands of those who are called by their Saviour's name, and yet remain indolently at home, or improperly occupied by business, or by pleasure, while *the word of God* is diligently, and, I trust, zealously and conscientiously, preached, in places always open to the cheerful worshipper? Perhaps they would rather imitate the behaviour of the Jews, who, on this occasion, were envious at the great assemblage, and for that reason *contradicted* the Apostles, and *blasphemed* their divine doctrines. But whatever may be the motives for their conduct, they have cause to fear that the result may be the same to them, that it was to the blaspheming Jews. The word of God may be withdrawn from them; and then, what a dreadful scene would follow! How men have lived without religion, we have seen in later days than the Apostles'; and if we go forward in the same career, we may see it again, and nearer home than we suspect. The minister of Christ is bound thus openly to warn his hearers, *whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear*; and though the days of Apostolic boldness are ended, there is a sincerity, there is an authority, with which every man, at least every preacher of righteousness, should dare to speak.

We have a striking instance of this evangelical,

intrepidity in the conduct of Paul and Barnabas. “ *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said.*” In proportion to the difficulties of their situation, the Spirit of God endowed them with corresponding courage. And such is the kindness of Providence to the general wants of men, that when they are called to exertions beyond the ordinary course of human life, they are supported by means which they had no reason to expect. The humble man, when persecuted, *waxes bold* in the face of his oppressors. The suffering Christian, though, like his Saviour, he is *dumb before his shearers*, possesses yet that true dignity of character, derived from Him who said, “ I will give you a mouth and wisdom ;” which enables him, in proper time and place, to use the Apostle’s words : “ *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*” Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and told their opposers that they had done *their* duty in offering to them the glad tidings of salvation, but as they had rejected them, and “ *judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life,*” that is, by their behaviour, passed, as it were, this severe sentence on their own conduct, by renouncing the glorious privileges of the Gospel—behold, say they, in compliance with the ancient prophets, *we turn to the Gentiles*, we pledge ourselves to hold out this heavenly light as a guide and director to *all*, not to the Jews of other places, and devout proselytes only, but even to the idolaters of every future age, and every distant nation.

“ When the Gentiles (the devout proselytes) heard this, they were glad ;” not surely that the

Jews were rejected, but that *they* were accepted without obedience to the external ceremonies of the Mosaic law. No good man can rejoice at the final destruction of any sinner ; nor ought any man, in any case, to use harsh judgment against his brother. Too truly may we see some, every day of our lives, concerning whose final destination we might be tempted to conjecture ; but as there may be circumstances in every man's case, unknown to us, we should be directed by the charity of our Saviour, and not judge *according to the appearance*.

“ The Gentiles were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord ;” were thankful for the Lord's goodness in extending to them the blessings of the Gospel ; “ and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” This is one of those passages of Scripture which have been supposed to admit the Calvinistic doctrine of absolute predestination. But the original expression will bear no such interpretation. It does not say, ordained, as it were, by a divine decree, but it is put in contradistinction to those Jews who “ judged themselves (by rejecting the Gospel) as unworthy of everlasting life.” Thus the one were *disposed*, the other *not disposed*, to accept the offered salvation. The Greek word is a military term, and refers to those who were enlisted, enrolled, or disposed in ranks ; as if it had been said, “ There believed as many as had enlisted themselves, or were of the company of those who did hope, or earnestly labour for eternal life¹.”

¹ Joseph Mede's Works, p. 21.

Who these well-inclined converts were, is sufficiently explained in the context, namely, the devout Gentiles, who had been previously instructed in the worship of the true God. The native Jews blasphemed; the idolatrous Gentiles were then incapable of taking any part; and therefore the proselytes, who were better informed, are evidently those who were thus happily disposed towards the attainment of eternal life.

The success of the Gospel was now great, not only in Antioch, but in the adjoining country. "The word of the Lord was published throughout all that region." The first establishment of the Apostles was generally in populous situations, as best suited to their extensive plans. Providence makes use of ordinary means in the accomplishment of its purposes. And as one good man may confirm a whole family in holiness, so one holy family may diffuse its salutary principles around a considerable circle; one well-regulated town will communicate its blessings to a very distant neighbourhood.

But the tranquillity of these conversions was soon interrupted. The Jews at Antioch, being offended at the success of the Apostles, were indefatigable in their resentment. Not possessing any power themselves in a city of Greece, they procured friends to their cause in some females of rank, who were Jewish proselytes (thence called *devout*); and by their interest, the chief persons raised a persecution against the holy preachers, and expelled them from that place. We have here an instance

of the fatal consequence of undue influence. The secret exertions of the Jews to prevail with these honourable females to oppress the inoffensive teachers of a pure religion, were as reprehensible as the conduct of those who could be so persuaded. And what shall we say of the *chief men of the city*, who were passive instruments of these private suggestions? We shall only add, that truth never works in secret; justice never seeks a refuge in darkness; secret plots defeat their own purposes: for the Apostles, using only a mild, but significant mark of their disapprobation, depart for another city, leaving behind them an infant Church rejoicing in its new faith, and comforted by those inestimable spiritual gifts which were universally diffused on the primitive converts of the Gospel.

This expulsion of the Apostles was the immediate cause of a greater dispersion of their doctrines, as it occasioned them to penetrate still further into the heart of the country. They travelled to Iconium, another city of Asia Minor, in the province of Lycaonia, and introduced themselves at a Synagogue of the Jews, as they had before done at Antioch, and with the same happy success; “a great multitude both of the Jews, and also of the Greek (proselytes), believed.” But notwithstanding they had multiplied the number of their friends, they met with a violent and implacable opposition from the unbelieving Jews, who used every insidious art of obloquy and malevolence to exasperate the idolatrous Gentiles against

them. But God was their protector. He cast around them his impenetrable shield, and reserved them to execute the high purposes of his will. The voice of party was loud against them, but the work of God proceeded with alacrity. "The waves of the sea are mighty, and rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier¹." Under his shelter they "abode a long time" at Iconium, not intimidated by clamour, not terrified by threats, but *speaking boldly in the Lord*, who supported their holy cause by the most convincing miracles. The schism in the city at length came to an issue; and the Apostles, being informed that the magistrates had joined with their enemies, and were preparing for them the punishment of Stephen, used that prudent precaution, which is consistent with the best expression of duty, and fled.

Here let the rashness of intemperate zeal learn an important lesson. It is no mark of wisdom, and certainly none of religion, to court persecution, and expose our persons to unnecessary danger. Divine Providence watches over the steps of a good man; and when his death, or his sufferings, will produce advantages, either to himself or others, which his life or his prosperity cannot effect, his God calls him to suffer, or to die, in that way which is calculated to produce the most beneficial consequences. When that hour arrives which brings with it so severe a trial, it is a Christian's

¹ Psalm xciii. 4.

duty submissively to acquiesce; but as various benefits arise from the various circumstances and changes of human life, he ought to use such wise expedients to extricate himself from impending difficulties, as prudence and his reasonable faculties suggest. St. Paul once escaped privately from the walls of Damascus; and now he avoids an imminent danger by a precipitate flight. "Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and thy paths in the deep waters, and thy footsteps are not known¹."

Our Lord enjoined his earliest disciples, that "if they were persecuted in one city, they should flee unto another²;" they were neither to be intimidated nor dejected, but to persevere, through all resistance or oppression, to preach the acceptable tidings of salvation. Paul and Barnabas, expelled from one city, fled unto another, and still unto another, that the word of God might meet with no obstruction from their misfortunes. They disseminated the glorious truths, with which they were entrusted, wherever they found a resting place, and even where no resting place could be found. For this good end, they now removed to Lystra and Derbe, two neighbouring towns; and propagated their salutary doctrines, likewise, in every part of the surrounding country. Wherever they went, God gave testimony to their preaching by miracles. The concise history of the Acts frequently intimates, but does not always specify each particular instance of the Divine interposition.

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 19.

² Matt. x. 23.

At Lystra, the restoration of a lame man who had been one of the Apostles' hearers, and probably a convert, is noticed as introductory to an occurrence of uncommon interest. The infirmity of this person had admitted of no human relief; he was a cripple, and like him who, under similar circumstances, was cured at the word of Peter at the Beautiful gate of the temple, had *never* walked. St. Paul *stedfastly beholding him*, and perceiving, from that apostolic principle which he possessed of discerning of spirits, that he had *faith to be healed*, directed him to stand upright on his feet. At the same instant he *leaped and walked*; he moved with all the alacrity of health and strength. It may be observed, that the Apostle does not say, as St. Peter did, *In the name of Jesus rise and walk*; but the expression, "perceiving that he had *faith to be healed*," implies the same thing. He was healed *through the faith of Christ* which he heard Paul preach. -

Hardly had the miracle been performed, than the idolatrous spectators ascribed it to the immediate presence of their own divinities. "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men;" and "they called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercury," the god of eloquence, the constant attendant as well as messenger of Jove; from a supposed resemblance in point of person and character to these celebrated heathen deities. It is well known, from the histories of Greece and Rome, and particularly from the eminent poems which have been transmitted down to us of both nations, that the

fabulous account of the descent of their deities upon earth was a circumstance of popular belief. The observation of the Lystrians obliges us for a moment to attend to the different personal qualifications of the two Apostles. St. Paul says of himself, that his "bodily presence was weak, and his speech (that is, the manner, not the matter of his speech) contemptible¹." His outward appearance therefore, it is likely, was inferior to that of Barnabas. And with respect to the qualifications of the mind, it has with propriety been suggested, that "the Divine Wisdom might choose these two men for Apostles to the Gentile world, for this reason among others, that Barnabas's singular softness of temper, and remarkable goodness of manners, and Paul's zeal, warmth, [and eloquence] might make a proper mixture for so great and extraordinary an undertaking²."

The priest of Jupiter, whose temple, or image, stood at the entrance of the city, prepared his idolatrous rites, his consecrated bulls and garlands, brought them to the place of the Apostles' residence, and would have offered sacrifices to them with the people, from whom probably he had received intelligence of this miraculous cure.

How acute must have been the feelings of Paul and Barnabas, when they heard of these preparations; so different from that state of mind, which their preaching and actions were intended to produce. Distressed beyond measure, they ran in

¹ 2 Cor. x. 10.

² Benson's Hist. Vol. II. p. 22.

among the people, and, by a short, elegant, and eloquent address, endeavoured to restrain their rash intentions. “Sirs! why do ye these things? If you have at all attended to our words, the truth of which, a God, very different in nature from the objects of your worship, hath confirmed by this miracle, you will find that you are greatly deceived. We are no deities of your description, but men—men, like yourselves—men, subject to the infirmities of human nature, to disease, to death. Commissioned by a supreme Divine authority, we come here to preach unto you glad tidings of salvation¹, to instruct you in that wisdom which cometh down from above; and, as introductory to such knowledge, to reveal the nature of the great Creator of Heaven and earth—to turn you from dumb idols, from such vanities as these, unto a firm belief in the one *living* and true God.”

The expression of preaching glad tidings, as here used, goes much further than the meaning of *preaching* in the common translation; it implies, and evidently refers to the *Gospel* which they preached, and takes away the objection which might be made from the first appearance of the passage, that the *Unity* of the *Deity*, independent of the belief of the Gospel, was only in this place inculcated by the Apostles. They never lost sight of their mission; and therefore, even when they revealed to idolaters the One, supreme, intelligent Being, they did so upon evangelical principles.

¹ Ευαγγελιζόμενοι.

Addressing those who had no previous knowledge of revelation, our Apostles use different arguments from those with which they had made converts of the Jews and Jewish proselytes. They prove the being of a God by an infallible inference from the works of creation and providence. Who made the Heavens, and the earth, and the sea, with all their inhabitants? Could any dead idol, could any divinity, or any number of divinities, with the limited capacities, with the infirmities, with the turpitude of character which the objects of your faith possess, bring into existence, or arrange, so wonderful, so exquisitely beautiful a frame, as that you now behold around you? Where were they when the Almighty God “laid the foundation of the earth? Let them declare if they have understanding. Can they bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion¹?” If *creation* belonged not to them, the inscrutable movements of *Providence* could form no part of *their* care. Discordant beings, such as your heathen deities are, supposing them to be able to act at all, could never act upon one uniform benevolent plan. The God, whom we acknowledge, poured his blessings in times past on those who knew him, and not on those who would not know him; now his bounties are distributed on every side, and plainly reveal his mercy and his goodness. “He left not himself without witness in that he did good, and gave the rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;” not only

¹ Job xxxviii. 4, 30.

natural, and material food, but the food of angels, as well as men, the true bread which cometh down from heaven; the Saviour, whose name hath made this man sound, whose salvation is now offered to *you*, and who will indeed fill your hearts with a joy and gladness of which no man can deprive you.

How deeply, it might be thought, must this spirited remonstrance have impressed itself on the minds of these idolatrous Lystrians! Yet even these words were scarce sufficient to restrain their ardour. The very eloquent and impressive language might induce some of them to think that there was a divine energy in their words, and that the gods had indeed visited their city in the likeness of men; but some, it is reasonable to suppose, would feel conviction, would renounce the vain objects of their former worship, and with unbounded gratitude profess a firm belief in the *One immortal, invisible, and only wise God, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Hardly have we admired the professed veneration of the Lystrians for Paul and Barnabas, than we are called upon to lament the instability of human friendships, and popular applauses, and to sympathize in the personal sufferings of their late favourite Apostle. Fickle, unstable multitude! ye are swayed by prejudice and party, tempted to resign your better judgments, and sometimes to become the unwilling instruments of an interested deceiver! The same unbelieving Jews, whose intrigues had driven them from Antioch and Iconium, appear as open enemies at Lystra. The credulous Lystrians

are taken in the snare; in a tumultuous manner they rise upon the Apostles, and, having stoned Paul, draw him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. But God was with him still; for while his friends stood around him, and lamented, as they thought, his untimely end, *he rose up*, restored probably by a miracle, and *came into the city*. God, when he pleases, can call our suffering friends from the grave and gate of death. Let us trust our happiness in his hands, and all things will work together for good.

This violent persecution obliged Paul and Barnabas to leave Lystra, and remove to Derbe, where the Apostolic mission was resumed with its usual success.

In a short time, not intimidated by sufferings, they returned to Lystra, where Providence had provided for them many friends: amongst the rest the family of Timothy, which appears to have been converted upon this journey, and to have afforded St. Paul considerable consolation. "I desire greatly to see thee (says the Apostle, in a letter written to Timothy after an interval of many years), being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also¹." These affectionate expressions must interest the heart, and are highly honourable to St. Paul, and to this Christian household. There is

¹ 2 Tim. i. 4, 5.

great probability, that Timothy, young as he then was, was one of those sympathizing friends who watched the death or recovery of Paul when he was stoned at Lystra, and who was an interested witness of his sufferings at other places. “But thou hast *fully known* my doctrine, manner of life—persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me¹.” We look back upon the good offices of a friend with sentiments of the tenderest kind. No time can obliterate the impression. And when he has not only sheltered from distress the head exposed to pain and suffering, but has poured wine and oil into the wounded heart, the warmest drops of gratitude cherish the remembrance, and the best principles of Christianity record it in heaven.

Notwithstanding the many injuries the Apostles had endured in the course of this important journey, led by the same Almighty hand, they retraced their footsteps through the very cities that had violently expelled them; in every place *confirming the souls* of their new converts, exhorting them not to faint under the prospect of affliction, but to continue steadfast in that faith which would make them more than conquerors, for under the present circumstances of the world, “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” Alas! to this day the observation is applicable to every disciple of the Gospel. Though we may not be

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.

called to equal sufferings with a Paul, or the first followers of Christ, or with those who, in later ages, have borne this severe witness to the truth, by being stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword, or committed to the flames, yet in most cases the Christian, like his Master, may expect to be tried by sufferings. If our afflictions come not always *from without*, most assuredly they will *from within*. Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, and evil propensities of every kind. Here then surely is cause for trouble. But Christian faith triumphs over all; and these afflictions, which are but for a moment, through the grace of God communicated to every one who thus believeth, “work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory¹.”

One great object, accomplished by the Apostles' return, was the ordination of regular Ministers in all the Churches which they had established, by the same ceremony used at their own ordination; namely, by prayer, fasting, and the imposition of hands. In no part of the early history of Christianity do we read of self-ordained Pastors; and as the days of immediate inspiration are long since past, and we have no reason to expect, and much less to deserve, a particular revelation, we must rest contented with that ordinary suggestion of the Holy Spirit, which prompts us to aspire after this holy office, and that original Church authority, which enjoins, that “all things be done decently and in order².”

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

After this manner Paul and Barnabas passed through the provinces of Pisidia and Pamphilia ; and after spending some short time in Perga, where they had formerly landed from Cyprus, and preaching the Gospel there, they changed the latter part of their tour, and came to Atalia, another sea-port town of that country, and passed by sea to Antioch in Syria, from whence they had originally been recommended to the important work which they had now fulfilled. As faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, they render an account of their mission to the assembled Church ; and they rejoice together at the large accession of Christian believers, in the persons of the idolatrous Gentiles.

With the transactions of this journey, I conclude this Section of my Lectures. We see the great plan of the Gospel gradually unfolding before our eyes. Let us use our endeavours to further its progress throughout the earth. Though wickedness continue to prevail, and infidelity to flourish, let us not be discouraged. Such things must needs be, but the end is not yet. But whatever be the lamentable state of public religion, every man should remember that he has a little world within his own breast, as well as within the influence of his brief authority. Let these be the sphere of his private conquests ; for with respect to him who *conquers himself*, and *rules well his own house*, God's blessing will accompany his labours, and acquaint him that he has not lived, neither has he borne *his* sceptre in vain.

SECTION III.

LECTURE XV.

ACTS XV. 1—35.

Paul and Barnabas remain a long time at Antioch.—Attend a General Council of the Apostles at Jerusalem, concerning Circumcision. Antioch.—Jerusalem.—Antioch. A.D. 51, 52.

THE return of holy times and seasons, the recurrence of pious thought and devout meditation, the review of past comforts, and the approach of expected hours of happiness, afford to the religious mind a constant and never-failing source of intellectual delight. With propriety may all those adopt the observation, who are accustomed to diversify the necessary employments of life, with the still more necessary study of the Word of God, and attention to the important duties of devotion. These true servants of their Maker “go out to their work, and to their labour, until the evening¹ :”—but as the close of the day reminds them of re-

¹ Ps. civ. 23.

freshment and repose, the silent and solemn season brings with it sentiments suitable to its tranquillity; and they reflect upon that “rest, that *eternal* rest, which remaineth for the people of God¹.” To this period of calm joy and religious delight, the weary and heavy laden look forward with earnest expectation, and through faith in the promises of the Gospel, endure the evils, or reputed evils, of life, as “seeing Him who is invisible.”

Thus, my Brethren, are we again assembled, by the blessing of God, at this holy season and in this holy place, from our various avocations and employments, to pursue the delightful study of the Scriptures, to follow the steps of the primitive Apostles, and by the prospect of their faith to invigorate our own. May our God make that faith steadfast in our hearts! May its most invaluable properties be so incorporated with every action of our lives, every movement of our souls, that our “whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ²!”

We left the Apostles, Paul and Barnabas, after a successful journey to convert the idolatrous Gentiles, peacefully settled at Antioch in Syria, and preaching the pure doctrines of Christianity to the Church at that place. “Here they abode a *long time* with the Disciples³.” But as the happiest of men have no reason to expect a continuance of prosperity, so the best established Churches may, from outward or inward causes, look for an occa-

¹ Heb. iv. 9.

² 1 Thess. v. 23.

³ A. D. 47—51.

sional interruption of their tranquillity. In this dispensation, Providence designs the good of both.

The doctrines peculiar to the revealed Gospel of Christ were the great subjects of the Apostles' preaching at Antioch ; and particularly that most important doctrine so emphatically inculcated by St. Paul in his Epistles, that the salvation of Christians depended on the *alone* merits of Him who became a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of men. Some of those converts who had formerly professed the religion of the Jews, retained so much of their prepossession for the rites of the Mosaic law, that they were not satisfied with this account of Christianity. They held a different doctrine ; and taught publicly that, faith in Christ alone was *not* sufficient for salvation, but that they were to add to this the distinguishing tenets of the Jewish Legislator. Fraught with this opinion, certain brethren came down from Judæa, and very peremptorily declared to the Christians at Antioch, that " except they were circumcised after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved."

They could not be saved!—How dare any fallible man pronounce so decided a sentence on a fellow mortal ? Who are we, that we should think ourselves the mouth of God ? Even when the wicked man walks abroad with bold and open front, the humble Christian fears indeed for his salvation, and prays for his deliverance from the tyranny of sin, but he will not hastily pronounce his final judgment ; he will not restrain the mercies of his Saviour, or deny the efficacy (however doubtful the

case) even of a momentary repentance. When an over-curious inquirer addressed Jesus Christ with this question, "Lord! are there few that shall be saved?" he answered, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate¹;" it can be of no importance to you to know how many or how few shall be saved; take care of yourself; look into your own breast; endeavour to be one of the number of the blessed, and leave the final doom of other men to the Judge of all the earth. The Gospel has indeed unequivocally disclosed the terms of salvation, and has decidedly pronounced who shall *not be saved*. But as at the same time, it holds forth mercy, not such a mercy as should encourage sin, but such as should induce the sinner to apply for it on pure motives, namely, faith and repentance, we ought to be very cautious in our judgments of other men's salvation. As it is our duty always to fear for ourselves, so is it a branch of Christian charity to *hope all things* for our neighbours. In this charitable sense, our excellent Church speaks of the departure of her members in the Office for the burial of the dead.—"We meekly beseech Thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin, unto the life of righteousness; that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as *our hope is*, this our brother doth."—There are indeed different degrees of hope; some of which, alas! are raised but a little above despair. Yet we should take our Church's conduct, as a model of our own. Whatever decisive sentence she pro-

¹ Luke xiii. 24.

nounces against *sin*, she is still willing to *hope* the best for the *sinner*.

When this declaration was made by these Judaizing Christians to the believers at Antioch, that the rites of Moses were still expected to continue in force, we may easily imagine the uneasiness of Paul and Barnabas, who had preached salvation by grace, without the works of the law. “No small dissension and disputation” arose amongst them concerning this question, which indeed was of the highest importance, as the profession of genuine Christianity depended on the decision. To mix discordant materials in the erection of the holy Church of Christ, would be not only to disfigure, but to destroy, the building. It would be a grievous offence to Him “who loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish¹.” To preserve it in this purity of doctrine and perfection of beauty, it was determined, that these zealous preachers and defenders of the faith, should go up to Jerusalem, accompanied by some other members of their community, (among whom we find Titus, an uncircumcised convert²) to lay the whole controversy before a council of the chief leaders of the Church of Christ.

On this journey, the Apostles had the great object of their mission constantly in view ; and related the success of their preaching among the idolatrous

¹ Eph. v. 27.

² Gal. ii. 3.

nations, to the several churches in Phoenice and Samaria, which lay in their way, “which caused great joy unto all the brethren.” None but those who experimentally feel the value of religion, can sincerely rejoice in its diffusion. He, whose heart is not warm towards the Gospel, has no interest in the conversion of savage nations; hardly does he acknowledge the utility, except perhaps as a matter of human policy, in bringing into the fold of Christ, the ignorant, and too frequently, wretched natives of his own country. But God, who hath offered salvation through Christ to all the sons of men, hath declared, that he is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”—“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who *will have all men to be saved*, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth¹.”—“When thou art converted,” said our Lord to St. Peter, “*strengthen thy brethren.*” When, therefore, we see, or hear of, if we do not contribute to the enlargement of Christ’s kingdom, let us at least give this evidence of our own Christianity, like the converts of Phoenice and Samaria, that the circumstance *hath afforded* “*great joy unto all the brethren.*”

When Barnabas and Paul arrived at Jerusalem with their companions, they were received of the Church, (of the whole body of Christians), as well as of the Apostles, (Peter, James, and John, then resident there), and Elders, with the same

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 9. 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

kindness and hospitality, which had accompanied them on their journey. To these pious friends and counsellors they communicated the important object of their mission, and informed them not only of the good success of their endeavours, but of the obstructions they had met with; and particularly they observed, that certain believing Jews, who still retained a little of the leaven of their sect, had assumed the authority of commanding the converted Gentiles to “keep the law of Moses.”—Whether they were still bound to the observance of this law, was the question proposed to the deliberation of the Synod.

It should here be remarked, that the primitive Christians departed no further from the injunctions of the Old Testament, than was absolutely necessary to establish the New. The peculiar rites and ceremonies indeed of the Jewish law could not but be repealed, as they alluded to a state which no longer existed; but the moral law was “holy, just, and good;” and the civil jurisdiction was respected by the native Jews, as long as their civil governors remained. In establishing the new ecclesiastical government too, they proceeded upon the Jewish model; and, as in this case, had recourse to a public council in matters of controversy. “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, thou shalt come unto the Priests and Levites, and unto the Judge that shall be in those days, and enquire, and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment¹.”

¹ Deut. xvii. 8, 9.

In different ages, the Church of Christ has adopted the same method of settling ecclesiastical disputes, but not always with the same success. After the first four General Councils, the authority of which alone was acknowledged by the Reformed Churches, many grievous errors, both in doctrine and in practice, were sanctioned by different councils, as the interests of different leaders prevailed. It does not come within my subject to be more particular on this head. This council of Jerusalem, however, being considered as the model of all others in the Christian Church, it becomes necessary to remark, wherein it differed essentially from many which have passed under this denomination. But because this council, at which divinely inspired apostles assisted, was confessedly authentic and infallible, we ought not to infer that all, or any other councils not so constituted, should have the same authority. Although on controverted points, the assembling of a public council is the safest rule to adopt; for *where two or three are met together* to ask any thing of God on pure and catholic principles, there is reason to think, on the word of sacred authority, that *he will be in the midst of them*, and direct their deliberations; yet from the interference of political rights, and from the consideration that all the members which compose a council may *not be governed with the Spirit and word of God*, we have reason to conclude with our Church, that “general councils may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining to God.” Article 21.

We now behold the solemn assembly convened. We see St. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, president of the meeting. Other holy apostles and elders surround him; and those who make the charge stand ready to support it. Without disorder or confusion of any kind, the argument is stated, and the pleadings commence. Truth, like the penetrating sunbeam, breaks in upon the holy meeting; and a decree is given, conformable to the revelation of the Spirit, and the consistency of the sacred writings.

St. Peter, in the first place, addresses the assembly, and warmly contends for that "liberty, with which Christ had set them free¹." There is great propriety in his address, as he was the first who had been appointed by God to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and, beginning with the conversion of Cornelius, continued thus to exercise his important commission. His reasons are weighty. 1. He acquaints them that they could not but know how he himself was circumstanced, that he was chosen in a miraculous manner for this purpose, and that he had acted according to his instructions. 2. As a proof that his commission came from heaven, he informs them that God bare witness to the conversion of the Gentiles by an effusion of the Holy Ghost, and a communication of spiritual gifts, in the same manner as they had been at first given to the apostles themselves; and that there was no difference between them, *the hearts of both being*

¹ Gal. v. 1.

purified by faith only—the circumcision of the heart, the true circumcision of Christians, superseding the necessity of all external rites. 3. This being the case, he argues, that it would be to *tempt God* to disobey the will and command of God, if they were to impose the heavy yoke of the law, which could not justify, on the converts of Christianity; for if “there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the law¹.” 4. He therefore concludes, that it is an article of faith, inviolable and immoveable, independent of all works of men, much less of the now abrogated works of the Mosaic Institutions, that men are only to be saved by the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

This judicious harangue prepared the minds of the hearers for the testimony of Paul and Barnabas. A solemn impression was made on the council by the declaration of these eminent apostles of what “miracles and wonders God had wrought among the *Gentiles* by them.” The proper inference therefore is, that the divine commission was not confined to the circumcised Jew, but extended also to the uncircumcised Gentile; as God would not give the attestation of miracles to a commission which he did not sanction.

It is necessary to interrupt the narrative to observe, that a difference of opinion has arisen among commentators, who are to be understood by these *Gentiles*? whether *Proselytes of the gate*

¹ Gal. iii. 21.

only, who were obliged to obey certain rules called the Precepts of Noah, or *all heathen converts* in general? Whatever may be the true opinion, it is evident from the decision of St. James, which we shall soon meet with, that the great object of the council was, as much as possible, to avoid any unnecessary offence being given to the converted Jews. For this purpose great deference appears to have been paid to their prejudices, where it did not interfere with the profession of pure Christianity. But this is often a dangerous experiment; and instances occur even amongst the apostles themselves, where the effect of this spirit of accommodation was not always successful¹.

When Paul and Barnabas had given their testimonies, the President of the Council made his decision, which met with the universal approbation of the Assembly. "Simeon," he says, "has told you how God at first, that is, at the first of his preaching, did visit the Gentiles, and that one of them, as first fruits, was converted by himself—but the original disclosure of this great event was made long before this period. The prophets in general, and in particular the prophet Amos, some centuries before, predicted that the "house of David should be restored in the person of Messiah, and that the residue of men (the remnant of Edom, one of the fiercest enemies of Israel, as it has been translated) might seek after the Lord, and *all the Gentiles* upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doth all

¹ See Gal. ii. 11, &c.

these things¹." Let no man then think this a new invention; for God, who knows all things, hath revealed it thus long ago to his holy Prophets; and the purposes of divine Providence must be completed. "Wherefore," he adds, "*my sentence* is, I judge by the authority with which I am invested, that we trouble not the converted Gentiles with an observance of the ceremonial law, but esteem it sufficient caution for them, if we direct them in their intercourse with the Jewish Christians to abstain from what may give offence, from *pollutions of idols*, and from *fornication*, and from *things strangled*, and from *blood*." If you so far conform to these injunctions, which are yet short of those enjoined the Proselytes of the Gate, you will give no offence to the native Jews; for the law of Moses, of which these precepts form a part, is read every Sabbath day in their own synagogue.

The wisdom and policy of this venerable Council are both conspicuous in this sentence. The Apostles and Elders are desirous of preserving the unity and tranquillity of the Church, and therefore they neither betray the true doctrine of the Gospel, by acknowledging that any legal works were necessary or meritorious to salvation, nor do they obstruct the propagation of Christianity among the Jews, by opposing such ceremonies as were at least innocent in their nature. "It is one thing," says an eminent divine², "to be bound to observe the law of Moses as a matter of necessary duty, it is another thing to

¹ Amos ix. 11, 12.

² Sherlock's Disc. Vol. iv. Disc. 12.

comply with some parts of that law upon motives of Christian charity and prudence. It was lawful for the Gentile converts to live without observing any part of the law of Moses ; but though all things are lawful, yet, as St. Paul says, ‘ all things are not expedient, all things edify not.’ In all the cities where the Gentile Churches had been planted, there were Jewish converts likewise, who were zealous of the law, and who would hold no communication with the Gentiles who *eat blood* and the like ; and therefore, unless the Gentile Churches complied in such particulars, there must be an irreconcilable division in the Church of Christ, to the loss of that charity on which the Gospel sets so great a price. From whence it is evident,” concludes the same author, “ that the injunctions of the council were founded upon prudential considerations with respect to the Jews, and the matters ordained by the council were matters of discipline and government only ¹.”

This interpretation removes the difficulty of those

¹ Lev. xvii. 11. “ The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls ; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore, I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood,” &c.—Here appears the reason of this strict and often repeated prohibition : blood was appointed as the atonement for sin, it was set apart and sanctified for that purpose ; and consequently, when the use of the altar and sacrifices ceased, at the death of Christ, the prohibition of eating blood should cease also, and the precept concerning it in the Acts of the Apostles seems to have been prudential and temporary. Jortin’s Rem. on Eccl. Hist. Vol. I. p. 215.

who imagine, that the decree was either applicable to the Proselytes of the Gate only, or of perpetual obligation to all future Gentile converts. Neither of these was exactly the case; as particularly appears from the writings and conduct of St. Paul. How far compliance is necessary to remove offence in things not forbidden by the laws of God or man, he has sufficiently explained. “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably, destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died. For the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost¹.”

When the Jewish polity came to an end by the destruction of Jerusalem, the decree of this Council could be of no further validity; and where there is no nation of Jews, the use of blood is an indifferent thing. But I agree in the opinion of a learned writer, that “should a considerable number of Jews be now kept out of the Christian Church by *that alone*, it would still be the duty of those Christians among whom they dwelt, to forbear the use of it, on the principles stated by the Apostle, 1 Cor. viii².” “For meat destroy not the work of God; all things indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence³.”

¹ Rom. xiv. 14, &c.

² Doddridge's Lect. 192.

³ Rom. xiv. 20.

With respect to the nature of those things which are forbidden by the decree, they are understood to represent the whole of what have been called the seven precepts of Noah, and enjoined the Jewish Proselytes. As the Scriptures are silent concerning these precepts, we may be so too. But the four injunctions here recited, evidently allude to such parts of general conduct as would offend the Jews, and led directly to that idolatry, which they now professed to have forsaken.

The reason is plain and needs no comment, why they were commanded to abstain from *pollutions of idols*. Abstinence from *blood*, and *things strangled*, which retained the blood, were enjoined by the Levitical law, probably because the use of them tended to promote a savageness of nature; not merely perhaps as *eating blood* according to the *words* of the injunction, but according to the scope of the expression “flesh, *with the life thereof*, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat¹ ;” that is, thou shalt not eat a limb cut from a living animal with the blood and life *in it*. The moral of which will then be, “I will not permit you to use cruelty towards the brute creatures, for that will lead you to cruelty towards one another, and to murder men².” Nor will there be any doubt of the propriety of joining with those *legal* abstinences a prohibition of *fornication*, though in itself a *moral* offence. If it were not morally wrong to eat blood, or of things strangled, they might still lead to the commission of a moral offence. Savage natures require restraint.

¹ Gen. ix. 4.

² Benson, Vol. ii. p. 69.

But fornication was both a moral crime, and tended to promote idolatrous rites amongst those to whom this decree was directed. In heathen countries, the impurities of idol worship are too well known; and for this reason, both in the Old and New Testaments, fornication and idolatry are frequently joined in the same prohibition. Indeed they are often put for each other, and the Gentiles are continually charged with this double transgression. The Church of Thyatira, in the book of Revelation, is threatened because she permitted “that woman, Jezebel, to seduce the servants of God to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols¹.” Let us avoid *both*, by following the Apostle’s advice. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour: not in the lust of concupiscence, *even as the Gentiles*, which know not God².” And in another passage the Apostle is still more explicit, where no sophistry of man can alter the expression. —“Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, shall inherit the kingdom of God³.” Let him, then, who dreads the punishment of idolatry, be equally afraid of God’s judgement against impurity of every kind.

If the word, which we translate *fornication*⁴, be still further considered, we shall find another sense, which some have imagined to be the true interpre-

¹ Rev. ii. 20.

³ 1 Cor. vi. 9.

² 1 Thess. iv. 3, &c.

⁴ πορνεία.

tation in this place, namely, marriages within those degrees of consanguinity and affinity, which were prohibited by the Mosaic law. Should this interpretation be adopted, it will still be found, that there is the greatest propriety in joining together these apparently discordant injunctions, and that nothing is without a sound and convincing reason, which we are taught in the word of God.

The decree being settled, it was determined to promulge it in the most solemn manner; to those Churches especially, where the disputation had arisen. For this purpose not only Paul and Barnabas were deputed, (to the integrity of whose characters the Council bears the greatest attestation), but, as they might be thought interested in the question, two other brethren, Judas and Silas (or Silvanus) were commissioned also to accompany them on their return to Antioch, and corroborate by word of mouth the resolution of the Church assembled at Jerusalem.

The Epistle which they carried contained the whole scope of the conference and the decree, with this censure of those who had excited the question, that they had *troubled them with words, subverting their souls* by enjoining those who were incorporated into the body of Christ's Church, to practise the ceremonial part of the Mosaic law. The dangerous addition of human works of any kind as a *motive* for our justification, though they are by no means excluded as an *expression* of it, would totally overturn the fabric of Christianity, "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircum-

cision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free, but Christ is all and in all ¹.”

The authority of the decree is also established in the Epistle which was directed to the Gentile Churches. “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost *and to us*.”—Not that the opinion of the Council could give any additional authority to the determination of the Holy Spirit of God, which might justly bring upon them the charge of blasphemy and presumption: but the expression in this place applies to what had been before advanced in the deliberation of the Assembly; that as the Holy Ghost, in the case of Cornelius, had declared, that “the middle wall of partition ²” was broken down between the Jews and the Gentiles, and that the latter, *could* be received within the pale of Christianity *without the rite of circumcision*, and as it had also been intimated by the prophet Amos, that *the Gentiles should seek after the Lord*, so the Apostles thought it right to found their judgment on the infallible dictates of the Holy Spirit. “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost *and to us* ;” *to us* guided by the Holy Ghost.

The Council being dissolved, Paul and Barnabas with Judas and Silas, bear the tidings to the Church at Antioch. When they had read the Epistle, they rejoiced for the consolation it had afforded them, by freeing them from the bondage of the ceremonial law, and explicitly declaring the important doctrine of justification.

¹ Col. iii. 11.

² Eph. ii. 14.

Judas and Silas very warmly supported the decree of the Council at Antioch. The former having fulfilled his mission, returned to Jerusalem; the latter continued at that place a longer period, and added his valuable labours to those of Paul and Barnabas, and many other zealous preachers of the Gospel.

From a serious perusal of the transactions of this Council, it will be evident how much we are all concerned in the determination of the Apostles; for though the decree *as such* has no reference to us, having been abrogated by the dissolution of the Jewish state, yet its consequences still remain, by uniting the Gentile world to the spiritual body of Christ.

The decree was intended to preserve the Gentiles from relapsing into idolatry;—let the motives *for* the decree operate on our minds, by giving us a pure faith, and preserving us, through grace, from the errors of those who, though called Christians, still continue without Christ; in a Gentile state, “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.”—The decree was intended to prevent any unnecessary offence being given to the Jews, which might hinder them from accepting the terms of the Gospel:—let us beware, lest our conduct should have the same effect in the Holy Church of which we are members. If those *without the Church* see us acting in a manner inconsistent with those salutary

¹ Eph. ii. 12.

restraints which our religion imposes, can they suppose that our belief is sound? Will they renounce their worldly lusts, and come among us, when they see us live in such a state of careless unconcern, if not actual depravation, as would disgrace any profession?—The decree was intended to take away all occasion of offence from a weak brother; “If meat,” says St. Paul, “make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend¹.” We should not be backward in adopting measures of peace and unity in the Christian Church, though perhaps sometimes with inconvenience to ourselves, provided there is no innovation in the essential doctrines, and primitive practices, of the Gospel. “Give none offence in any thing, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God².” Act upon the broad basis of Christian Faith, and you will not only give no offence, but your sincere belief and corresponding holiness of life will become blessed means of grace and salvation to numbers that surround you.—Lastly, the decree was intended to remove the burthensome ceremonies of the law, and to impose only the light and easy yoke of Christianity. “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage³.” This subject is discussed by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, and in that to the Galatians, which has a particular reference to this Council at Jerusalem, as well as to

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 13.² 1 Cor. x. 32.³ Gal. v. 1.

a transaction connected with it, not mentioned in the Acts. With the law, all legal obligation passed away. The shadow became unnecessary when the substance appeared. But, thanks be to God! the Gospel remains, and offers to us a pure and lively faith, which justifies us freely. “We have believed,” says St. Paul, “in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified¹.” On this doctrine rested the decision of the Council. On this, therefore, depends the Christian’s hope. But let no man deceive himself with false expectations of salvation. There is one consistent plan in the ways of Providence, and in the works of grace. *We are justified by faith*; a faith productive of good works. “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love² :” or, as it stands in another passage—but *a new creature*, or rather *a new creation*. This internal, radical change of heart, this true fruit of the Spirit, and this only, is a sure proof of our justification, and acceptance with God. The *kindness and love of God* hath called you to everlasting life. Beware that ye *receive not the grace of God in vain*. “As He that called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation³.”

¹ Gal. ii. 16.² Gal. v. 6.³ 1 Pet. i. 15.

LECTURE XVI.

ACTS XV. 36.—XVI.

St. Paul's second Apostolic Journey.—Dissension and Separation of Paul and Barnabas.—Travels of Paul and Silas from Antioch in Syria, through the Countries of—Syria and Cilicia, the Cities of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium, the Regions of Phrygia and Galatia, the City of Troas, the Island of Samothracia, and the Cities of Neapolis and Philippi in Macedonia. A. D. 53.

IN delineating the character and conduct of the primitive Apostles, we are struck with that sublime fortitude with which they met persecution. Never dejected under oppression, never intimidated by punishment, they pursue their high commission, and are as ready to *die*, as to be *bound*, for the great truths which they deliver. In travelling with them from one interesting event to another, we remark the value of that principle which influenced their labours, and led them, not with those high-wrought sentiments which have given birth to the heroes of romance, or those enthusiastic raptures which have produced spiritual impostors, but with cool and steady intrepidity to obey their holy calling.

This observation, applicable indeed to all the Apostles, is at present more particularly to be attributed to St. Paul, whose conduct, about this period, becomes almost the sole object of the historian's attention. He had not long been returned to Antioch from the council which had been holden at Jerusalem, before he proposed to Barnabas to visit the Churches which they had planted; and in which, as it appears from his Epistles, he exercised an episcopal authority¹. The government of the Christian Church during the lives of the Apostles, was clearly established in themselves, and was by them transmitted to "faithful men," who, from time to time, were expected to discharge the same important duties. It was necessary, therefore, that the governors of the Church should make occasional circuits among their converts, for the purpose of regulating their several spiritual concerns; and, at this time, one object of this apostolic journey was to "deliver them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the Apostles and Elders which were at Jerusalem."

The proposal made to Barnabas produced a warm contention between two good men. Barnabas determined to take his relative, John Mark, as an associate, but Paul opposed his intention, as the young man, fearful of labour and peril, had deserted them upon a former occasion. It has been observed on this circumstance, that Paul espoused the cause of justice, Barnabas that of humanity.

¹ See 2 Cor. xi. 28. 1 Cor. v. 1—8. 2 Cor. ii. 6.

When these great interests are at variance, the former must necessarily prevail. The result of this dispute is a proof of it; for the severity of Paul afterwards recalled Mark to his duty, and the venerable Apostle takes more than one opportunity of expressing his affection for him, acknowledging his obligations to him, and commending his zeal.

Let no man pretend to justify a quarrel from this instance of a difference of opinion between these good Apostles. The prevalence of infirmity is to be lamented in the best of men. The Apostles themselves were not exempt from the passions of human nature; but whenever they fell, the grace of God recovered them from a state of sin, and restored them to a sense of duty. When we err, may the consequence be the same! Till then, let us beware of cherishing the sentiment of the disobedient Prophet. "I do well to be angry¹." We may judge it expedient to differ in opinion from our neighbour, we may even think it necessary to withdraw from any familiar intercourse with him, but it is certainly neither consistent with Christian charity, nor Christian justice, to remain in a state of impenetrable and obdurate irreconciliation. The Apostles, it is probable, separated, as Abraham did from Lot, without any inveterate strife. "If thou take to the left hand, then will I go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then will I go to the left²." If such separa-

¹ Jonah iv. 4.

² Gen. xiii. 9.

tion must come, after all our well-meant endeavours to prevent it, let us not aggravate the evil by irritating and unnecessary contention.

The account of this dissension, amongst similar passages where the sacred writers record their own failings, must be considered as an additional proof of the truth of the narrative. An impostor would have suppressed the circumstance.

Barnabas took Mark, and, in the same manner as he had begun his last apostolic journey, went by sea to his native island of Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and took another road. The prayers of his holy brethren accompanied him: and "he went through Syria and Cilicia *confirming* the Churches;" earnestly inculcating the great doctrines of Christianity, reproofing the wicked, strengthening the weak, animating the irresolute, cheering the disconsolate, and giving the confidence of salvation to the humble and regenerate.

From this salutary practice of the primitive Apostles, of visiting personally the several Churches they had planted, arose the rite of *Confirmation* in the Christian Church. St. Paul is understood to allude to this rite by the expression of *The laying on of hands*, which he introduces immediately after mentioning *the Doctrine of Baptisms*¹. By the imposition of the Apostles' hands, very high spiritual gifts and graces were conferred. Many of these ceased with the first ages of the Church, as having accomplished the purpose for which they

¹ Heb. vi. 2.

were bestowed. But the ordinary effusion of the Spirit, we are assured, will never fail; and therefore, we have every reason to expect a communication of God's grace by a continuance of this holy ordinance. As Jesus Christ himself indeed did not expressly institute Confirmation, as he did Baptism and the Eucharist, we do not esteem it a *Sacrament*; but in our Church, where *Infant Baptism* is admitted, it is a reasonable and profitable ceremony, by which the young disciple of Christ, now firmly settled, by his own application, in the real grounds of his belief, accepts, *in his own person*, the holy vows which were made for him at his admission into the Church. And indeed I know not a sight which more interests the feelings, or leaves a deeper impression on the mind, than that of a large assembly of young persons, in the first bloom of life, the first spring of intellect, offering themselves before a venerable and pious successor of the Apostles, as candidates for immortality; as pressing forward into that *mystical body*, which is to give a new colour to their lives, by forming a *new creation* in their souls.—“Grant, O Lord, that we (with all the pious followers of our Lord) being regenerate, and made the children of God by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord¹!”

When St. Paul had arrived at Derbe and Lystra, both of which places he had visited on his last journey, he took a young man, a native, as it is

¹ Collect for Christmas Day.

supposed, of the latter city, of an amiable and excellent character, as an associate and companion. We have before mentioned Timothy, who had probably in early life been a spectator of St. Paul's sufferings at Lystra, and whose mother and grandmother, Lois and Eunice, were numbered amongst the earliest converts of the Gospel¹. If we select a youthful character from the Scriptures as an object worthy of imitation, none presents itself more exemplary. Happy in being educated in the bosom of a religious family, he imbibed a knowledge of the Sacred Writings, with that sweet food which nourished his earliest years. By these, he was well prepared for the reception of the pure doctrines of Christianity, to which the Jewish Scriptures only led the way; and fortified with these, he was thoroughly furnished for the conduct of a strictly pious life. At this period of St. Paul's visit to Lystra, "he was well reported of by the Brethren;" and every change in his condition confirmed their good opinion. An early education in sound religious principles, is the best pledge of a persevering piety. We may indeed in maturer years, by the grace of God, rescue ourselves from a state of sin; but the alteration requires a considerable degree of exertion, and must be attended with severity. But an early impression of true piety smooths the way before the greater temptations of the world, and overleaps those difficulties which obstruct the reformation of an aged convert.

¹ 2 Tim. i. 5.

Before Timothy began his travels with St. Paul, the Apostle, having ordained him a Minister of the Gospel by the imposition of his hands ¹, “took and circumcised him, because of the Jews in those quarters :” for though his mother was one of their own nation, “they knew that his father was a Greek ;” and therefore, (whether an Idolater, or Proselyte of the Gate) would not permit the use of that rite within his family.

St. Paul’s opinion with respect to Circumcision was well known, and had been publicly declared in the Council at Jerusalem. Why then, it is asked, did Paul at this time circumcise Timothy, when he refused, but a very short time before, as it appears in his Epistle to the Galatians ², to permit Titus to be circumcised ? The answer is very compatible with the decree. The cases were very different. The Council determined, that it was not necessary to circumcise a Gentile convert, because the ceremonies of the law were now abolished, and Titus was intended to be settled in a Gentile country, where no offence, at the omission of the ceremony, could be taken. But Timothy was to reside, for some time at least, among Jews, who would consider this, as an insurmountable objection to their conversion. Therefore the same spirit of accommodation which led St. Paul to acquiesce in the decree of the Council, lest the Jews should be prevented from joining the Christian Church, induced him in this instance, to depart from his

¹ 2 Tim. i. 6.

² Chap. ii. 3.

general custom, but not from his general opinion, respecting the necessity of Circumcision. "Unto the Jews, he became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews¹." Not that he complied, as has been alleged, for fear of the Jews, or out of hypocrisy of conduct, or of meanness of spirit. No. St. Paul's character was above such imputations. The purest motives always actuated his conduct. He knew that the Jews would not associate with Timothy, unless he was circumcised ; and therefore without a compliance with this rite, he could have no opportunity of supplying them with the waters of life freely. We are not to consider this according to our own ideas ; for we can have no proper conception of the extreme prejudices of the Jews. But we are, as it were, to place ourselves in Judæa at that period, to make a true apology for St. Paul. So unconquerable was this prejudice, that the Christian converts, *resident in Judæa*, continued the observation of this ordinance till the destruction of Jerusalem, and consequent dissolution of the Jewish state². They considered the Jewish ceremonies indeed as totally indifferent, and not at all essential to salvation ; they were, therefore, like St. Paul, occasional conformers, that they might promote the interests of that new arrangement of religious doctrines and duties, which they were called upon to support.

The early part of this apostolic journey is now hastily described by the Historian. In some places

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 20.

² Biscoe on the Acts, p. 630.

they were permitted to preach the Gospel; and others for reasons unrevealed, they were directed at present to pass by. They travelled through the countries of Phrygia and Galatia, where they planted the Gospel, and intended to have done the same in Asia, (that is, in *Asia proper*, a small part of Asia minor) but were prevented by a particular revelation. They then went to Mysia, on their road to Bithynia, but the Spirit of the Lord again altered their purpose. Therefore, passing by Mysia, they came to Troas; the city of Troas Alexandria, situated on the sea coast, at a short distance from the celebrated plain of Troy. At this place, the reason of the particular interference of the Spirit of God became manifest by a vision. The figure of a Macedonian appeared to the Apostle, entreating his assistance in a country, ready, perhaps, for conversion, but which had not yet been visited by the day-star of Christianity—"Come over into Macedonia, and help us." The country of Macedon, celebrated as the native place of Alexander, who obtained by extensive conquests and extensive cruelties the appellation of *Great*, lay across the upper part of the Ægæan sea. The Apostle Paul, with Silas and Timothy, was no longer at a loss to know the place of their present destination, and prepared for their departure. At Troas they were joined by St. Luke; a circumstance which we discover by the change of the expression, as well as by the more lengthened detail of the narrative. "After he had seen the vision, immediately *we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia." They now embarked for their short

voyage. The first day they reached Samothracia, an island in the mid-channel, and the next day landed at Neapolis, a city on the continent of Europe. From hence they sailed up the river Strymon to Philippi, the first city in that part of Macedonia, and a Roman colony, where they intended to make a longer abode, in compliance with the heavenly vision which had called them to preach the Gospel in that place.

On the Sabbath-day, that sacred day which no good man can suffer to pass by without offering up public, as well as private supplications to God, these holy men resorted to that place of worship which they found at Philippi; a place, as it is translated, "where prayer was wont to be made;" that is, where was a *Proseucha*, as it is generally understood, an oratory, or open court, sometimes planted with trees, and situated near the river's side. At Philippi, as it appears, there was no Synagogue, the society of Jews being very small; which we may judge from the congregation of worshippers being composed solely of women. On such occasions the next expedient was to procure a building of more easy expense, an open garden, which was sometimes situated on a hill, sometimes by the sea, or, as in this case, by the river's side, that in the bosom of retirement they might meet with no interruption to their devotion. To such a place as this did our Saviour himself resort for private meditation, when it is said, "he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in *prayer*

to God¹ ;” that is, in an oratory, or court of prayer to God. To such a place too does David refer, when he compares himself to a “green olive tree in the house of God².”

In the Jewish Synagogue a prescribed form of public service was used, which consisted of prayer, reading, and expounding the Law : in the oratories private devotion was pursued, and instruction was introduced in a more familiar way. This is evident from the easy manner in which St. Paul and his companions conducted themselves on this occasion : they *sat down*, and entered into conversation on the important topics of the Gospel, with the women who happened to be assembled there at that time.

The conversation of one of these, who was a native of a Grecian city, but a *worshipper of the true God*, that is, a Proselyte of the Gate, is particularly noticed by the historian. The account of this conversion demands our attention, as in it is displayed the root and progress of faith. “A certain woman, named Lydia, heard us ; *whose heart the Lord opened*, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” The preventing grace of God disposed her heart to receive the evidences of the Gospel. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God³.” Faith did not over-rule her reason, but directed it. When her heart was opened, she believed with full effect.

¹ Luke vi. 12.

² Psalm lii. 9.

³ Rom. x. 17.

She *attended* unto the saving doctrines which she heard, and resolved that within her breast they should bring forth their intended fruit. In vain are the most valuable words presented to the ear, if the grace of God *open not the heart*. This is the fatal cause of the great obduracy of mankind. It is not that they do not know, but that they will not understand. Oh! let us hear, that we may live! “Draw us, Lord, and we will run after Thee!” Let this be our prayer, when the salutary tidings of salvation are presented to us. Then may it truly be said, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear¹!”

When Lydia had been thus made sensible of the necessity of Gospel-Salvation, she accepted the conditions, and, with all her household, young, it is probable, as well as old, was made partaker of that Sacrament, which is properly considered as an indispensable mean of Grace; through which we receive “remission of sins by spiritual regeneration; that having enjoyed the everlasting benediction of the heavenly washing, we may come to the eternal kingdom which is promised by Christ our Lord².”

The argument used by this pious woman to induce the Apostle and his friends to take up their lodgings at her house, contrary to their usual custom, lest they should be burthensome to their converts, was unanswerable. “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come unto my house

¹ Matt. xiii. 16.

² Office for Public Baptism.

and abide there." Perhaps no situation in which any man can be placed is so productive of real and substantial happiness, none in which spiritual danger is at a greater distance, or religious confidence nearer at hand, than in the bosom of a pious, and an affectionate family. The storms which too frequently agitate human life, subside here into one smooth and placid ocean. "The Spirit of God here moves upon the waters;" and "the fruit of that Spirit is love¹."

When they were thus happily engaged, passing and repassing to and from their sequestered place of worship, they were frequently interrupted by a certain damsel who was possessed with a "spirit of divination²,"—a spirit of Python or Apollo, in

¹ Gen. i. 2. Gal. v. 22.

² "It is a question of importance, whether there has ever been in the Pagan world such a thing as *Divination*, or a fore-knowledge of things. The strongest argument against it is contained in Isaiah, chapters xl. and xlvii. Hence it has been concluded, that there never was such a thing as fore-knowledge in the Pagan world, a conclusion too large and absolute to be inferred from the premises. The Scriptures, though they seem in many places to allow that Evil Spirits may work miracles, yet no where suppose or intimate, that they can predict the future actions of men, except, perhaps, in Acts xvi. 16. and there it is not necessary that such prophecy should be meant. This narrative seems to determine the point in favour of Divination. Thus the Divine Providence so ordered it, that this occurrence should turn greatly to the honour and advancement of Christianity. But this prophetess might be in repute for discovering lost or stolen goods, or for revealing what happened in distant places, or for predicting changes in the weather, and might not be able to foretell the future actions of men."—Jortin's Rem. on Eccl. Hist. Vol. I. pp. 107, 124.

the heathen language, which is here adopted by St. Luke. We are to remember that St. Paul is now in Macedonia, a region of Greece; we are therefore to expect a reference to Grecian manners and customs. The celebrated Priestess of Apollo at Delphi (called Pythia, from the serpent Python, which was fabulously reported to have been slain by that heathen deity) pretended to deliver oracular answers, which she did in an extravagant and highly agitated manner. The responses of this damsel, whether she is to be regarded as a lunatic, as possessed of an evil spirit, or practising the trick of a ventriloquist, it is probable, were delivered after the same method practised by the Pythoness at Delphi. When this power, whatever it was, was miraculously suppressed by St. Paul, and her employers perceived that "the hope of their *private* gains were gone," then they endeavoured to interest both the magistrates and the multitude, by accusing these holy preachers of having committed an offence against the *public*. So easily do we accommodate our minds to prevailing circumstances: so much does self-interest, that corrupt and debasing principle, blind the eyes, and prejudice the understanding. The accusation against Paul and Silas, whom they considered as the principals, was, that they taught Jewish customs in a Roman colony. Then it was that they hurried them into the market-place, that is, the forum, or court of justice, and from a hasty sentence of the too easy magistrates, proceeded to lay many stripes upon them. Nor were they con

tented with this outrage : they committed them to prison, and “charged the jailor to keep them *safely*.” The charge was not without effect ; for the jailor added severe punishment to imprisonment. Unrelenting and inexorable, he *thrust them*—the very expression declares the roughness of their treatment—“into the *inner* prison,” a place doubtless of pre-eminent dampness and darkness ; and even in this solitude, ease of posture was denied them : “he made their feet fast in the stocks.”

But what cannot Christ accomplish for his servants ? Pain and suffering, the gloomy cell and massy iron bar, make but a light impression on the minds of those who are supported by Christian consolations. Smarting from recent wounds, disgraced by a punishment common to the lowest malefactor, in a cold and dreary prison, at midnight, how do these holy men occupy the lonely hour ? Not in sighs and complaints, not in contriving methods for their pardon or escape, not in uttering fruitless accusations against those who placed them in so dismal a situation ; but in prayer, and singing praises to God ; and that so happily, so cheerfully, and so loudly, that these expressions of their piety and joy were heard by their fellow-prisoners. Nor was this circumstance, probably, without an intention of Providence ; as the example of so much cheerful piety might prepare the minds of these miserable men for a future day of conversion. Thus may a good man, by divine grace, make outward misfortunes an inward blessing, convert

a deadly poison into wholesome nutriment, “ turn a prison into a chapel, and make a den of thieves to be an house of prayer¹.” Riveted though we may be to this earth by chains of iron, or, what is yet stronger, the attractions of a sinful world, or the temptations of that malignant being who once said to the Saviour, “ All these things will I give thee ;” yet, when supported by the gracious promises of the Gospel, and touched by a ray of the Divine Spirit, we cast them all aside ; we rise superior to such captivity through Him that strengtheneth us ; in heart and mind we ascend to heaven, and with Him continually dwell, who hath so loved us, and accomplished such great things for our sakes. Even where no miracle is wrought for our deliverance, the sharp inflictions of a bitter world are blunted by such heavenly expectations : for if the mind be not conquered, in vain will be all other triumphs over the feeble powers of this mortal body.

In immediate attestation of the eminent piety and resolutions of these Christian Confessors, Almighty God arrests the ordinary course of nature. An earthquake shakes the foundation of the prison, and every prisoner finds himself at liberty. The keeper, roused suddenly from his sleep, beheld the astonishing scene ; and imagining that all the prisoners had escaped, and that their punishment would be inflicted upon him, after the *Roman*, not after the *Christian* manner, drew his sword, and would have killed himself. This false, premature,

¹ Cave in locum.

not to say, wicked judgement, has led to many a fatal suicide. But if they would lay aside all presumptuous thoughts, and suffer themselves to be guided solely by the good Spirit of God, all dangerous temptations would be easily subdued ; and they would find that there was less hazard, and certainly more true glory, in a sincere and deep contrition of heart, and in relying on the merits and mercies of a Saviour, than in rushing with all their unrepented, unexpiated sins, into the presence of a justly incensed Judge.

St. Paul's humanity restrains the jailor's arm. The grace of God possesses suddenly his heart. Impressed with a sense of their real characters, from the extraordinary circumstance which had happened in the prison, he calls for a light, and sprang into the dungeon where Paul and Silas had been imprisoned. His body and soul were agitated to the quick ; he came trembling ; and, falling down before them in token of respect, accosted them with the most important question which can be asked by man, or answered in this mortal state—
“Sirs ! What must I do to be saved ?”—We are all interested in this inquiry. If we fail in this, every other search will be in vain. For what is all the knowledge which this world can supply ; what are all its riches, its pleasures, its allurements, its extensive power, or vaulting ambition, if we fail in the attainment of everlasting salvation ?—“Sirs ! What must I do to be saved ?” Must I worship virtue in her fairest form ? Must I rely on my own reason ? my own wisdom ? my own under-

standing? Must I depend upon my good works, or upon the greatness and support of my friends? Alas! these will all fail us; for of what value can all these things be to Him who *inhabiteth Eternity*? —“Sirs! What must I do to be saved?” These holy preachers of the only true faith shall give the answer. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” A true justifying faith in Christ is the only mean of man’s salvation. This foundation must be laid deep and strong; it must rest on solid and substantial motives. We must believe and be saved; we must not possess a barren unproductive faith, but such a lively sense of God’s mercies through Christ, as will enable us to give such an evidence of our belief, as the fine fruit does of the tree from whence it springs. This, and this only, will operate to our everlasting salvation.

But it may be inquired, How shall we know that we possess this saving faith? It will manifest itself by the change which it makes in the heart. “The tree is known by its fruits.” How smooth does it render the most rugged temper, how soft the most obdurate! How does it instill the sweetest principles of kindness, and make the man at ease with himself, and friendly to all around him! What tender longings after immortality does it excite within the soul, and “a desire to be with Christ, which is far better.” How does it abstract the mind from what gives to the unregenerate pain, and fix it on the serene sunshine of an heavenly mansion!

The conduct of the jailor is an instance of this

truth. He, who but a little before was cruel and hard-hearted, now melts with tenderness and compassion. He, who treated his prisoners with unusual severity, now soothes them with every expression of benevolence ; takes them from their dungeon, washes their wounds, presents them with seasonable refreshment, listens to them with attention while they open to him the pure doctrines of Christianity, and, finally, accepts, with his whole household, the first distinguishing mark of the Christian Covenant : he, and all his, were baptized straightway.

When the jailor had accomplished this important change of principles, he would gladly have obeyed the order of the Magistrates, who appear to have been now convinced that they had inflicted an undeserved punishment, and dismissed his prisoners. But St. Paul resisted the order, pleading his privilege from such a punishment as he had suffered, as a citizen of Rome, and attesting his innocence. At length, however, they complied, and returned to the hospitable board of Lydia, where they continued till their departure from the city, exhorting and comforting the converts they had made in that place.

The circumstances which have been detailed in this Lecture reflect particular lustre on the character of St. Paul. His prudence, his patience, and humility, are particularly displayed. When he declared himself a Roman citizen, it was not to preserve himself from suffering ; and when he refused to leave the prison, it was not to gratify his

pride. The Magistrates had illegally exercised their function, and to administer reproof was a part of the Apostle's duty. His answer to them was manly and dignified, becoming the character which he now held in trust, and compatible with the purest sentiments of Christian forbearance.

When we are called upon to fulfil the duties of our station, let us remember that we have a character to sustain, a character that we should neither stain by wickedness, nor sully by infirmity; a character which will support us in the hour of death, and will be our best recommendation in the day of judgment, the character of a Christian.

LECTURE XVII.

· ACTS XVII.

St. Paul's second Apostolic Journey continued.—Amphipolis.—Apollonia.—Thessalonica.—Berea.—Athens. A. D. 53, 54.

It is a strong, increasing, and invincible argument in favour of the Christian doctrines, that they are calculated for every clime, applicable to every age, and adapted to every description of men. Under this reflection, we possess both an external, and an internal, evidence of the truth of the Gospel; *external*, as there is no circumstance of time or place which opposes a general diffusion of its practical advantages; *internal*, as there is no conformation of the human heart which does not, or may not, closely embrace its salutary and sacred principles.

Apply this argument to the institutions of *false religions*, and the result will not be the same. Artificial means of support will betray the origin from whence *they* flow. The luxurious follower of Mahomet is captivated by promises congenial with an Arabian sky. The soft and effeminate Hindoo would find his lustrations, and even his diet, impracticable in the colder regions of the North.

Even Idolatry itself, which once had spread its baneful influence far and wide, and even now occupies a considerable portion of the globe, adapts its rites of worship, and even the characters of its idols, to the climate in which it is found, or the degree of knowledge which it happens to possess. It propitiates an alluring or a feeble deity on the island of Cyprus, or in the warm influence of an Egyptian sun ; it averts, amidst the storms of the polar regions, the stern and unrelenting vengeance of a Saxon divinity.

But Christianity, like the manna in the Wilderness, conforms itself to every palate, and finds an asylum in every country. The travels of the first preachers of the Gospel, carry with them a strong conviction of this truth. The primitive Apostles do not confine their labours to villages, or to cities, to cultivated, or uncultivated, nations ; but they pass on, like the great luminary of the heavens, and indiscriminately diffuse the blessings they convey. They equally proclaim their high commission to the barbarous native of Melita, the polished inhabitant of Thessalonica, Ephesus, or Corinth, and to the profound, and much celebrated, philosopher at Athens.

This variation of country, and uniformity of design, render St. Luke's narrative more interesting and instructive ; and produce at every interval arguments adapted to every capacity.

After St. Paul and his companions had left Philippi, they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, two cities of Macedonia, to Thessalo-

nica, then the capital of the country; a place of great population and much celebrity. It is probable that St. Luke remained some time longer at Philippi, as he says, *they came* to Thessalonica. Here they found a numerous society of Jews. The place of their assembling is therefore emphatically called *the* Synagogue, and might have been the only one, or at least the most frequented of any, at that time, in Macedonia. To this place the Apostle resorted, as it was his usual custom to offer the terms of the Gospel, first, to this once favoured nation. "Three Sabbath days" he attended at the Synagogue. Indefatigable in his assertions, he used these opportunities of *reasoning* with them; not as men that had *no faith*, not as men that looked for *no Messiah*; but as those who had no excuse, if they found not that holy Person who had been the general expectation of Jews in every age, fully disclosed in their own Scriptures. He "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures," the very writings which they held in the highest reverence, the very prophecies which they affected to believe. Alas! my Brethren, in what do we reprove the Jews? Are we believers also? Are the same Scriptures in our hands? Do we profess the same reverence for them? and are we partakers also of the same precious promises?—Let us then behold our Redeemer where they could not, or would not, find him. Let us be assured that his coming was foretold; let us also reflect that the time is passed when he was made man for us, and for our salvation, and therefore that we ought so

to apply the benefit of his first coming to our souls, that we may have reason to expect all the blessings of his second appearance.

These sermons of St. Paul were not without considerable effect; for though only a few of the Jewish hearers were converted, a great multitude of devout Greeks, that is, Gentile Proselytes of the Gate, including many females of rank, became members of the Church of Christ. That so many of this description were converted, is easily accounted for, by considering that they not only had not the inveterate prejudices of the native Jews to contend with, but had already embraced the principles, which led to their conversion. They had forsaken their idols, and worshipped the true God; they believed in the promises of salvation, and hoped for the life to come. We have reason too to imagine that many idolatrous heathens were also converted at Thessalonica. The Apostle afterwards reminds them of this happy change of condition; “how they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come¹.”

Whether these numerous conversions could be accomplished in three weeks (for St. Paul speaks only of *three Sabbaths* that he preached in the Synagogue) remains matter of doubt. I should rather be inclined to adopt the opinion of those commen-

¹ 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

tators, who think that St. Paul continued a longer period at this place, and taught in the house of Jason, after the opposition he met with from the unbelieving Jews. This is the more likely, as he acknowledges to the Philippians, that, during his residence at Thessalonica, they had *sent once and again* to supply his necessities¹; and, in his first Epistle to this Church, he mentions, that when he first preached the Gospel among them, they had *laboured night and day* not to be chargeable to them². It can hardly be supposed, that in three weeks' time they should require to be twice relieved by the Philippians, and their own manual labour for their support³.

The rapid increase of Christian converts excited the envy of their unbelieving adversaries, who assaulted the house of Jason, one of that number, in expectation of meeting with these successful preachers of a new religion. The charge, however, which they brought against them was of a civil, not of a religious nature. Being disappointed in not meeting with the leaders of the sect, they carried Jason, and some brethren who were with him, before the magistrates, and accused them as abettors of sedition.—“These, that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also.” One of the earliest prepossessions against the Christians was, that they were enemies of the civil government. A more unjust accusation was never preferred against a peace-

¹ Phil. iv. 16.

² 1 Thess. ii. 9.

³ Benson's First Planting, &c. v. 2. p. 99.

able and submissive order of men. It does not appear from any passage of Scripture, that our Saviour, or his Disciples, ever intended the smallest alteration in the respective governments under which they dwelt. On the contrary, wherever such ordinances are incidentally mentioned, the language of every Christian Teacher was "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers¹:" and that, even when Nero was the ruling emperor. It is consistent with history, however, and particularly illustrative of this passage, to observe, that an odium of this nature did attach itself to the primitive Christians, in consequence of the opposition made by Judas of Galilee to the taxation of the Roman Emperor. The principles of the sect, of which he was the head, rejected all obedience to human rulers, alleging that they were the servants of God alone. The sedition spread, and the peaceful followers of an heavenly Master were mistaken on this and similar occasions for associates of these rebellious subjects. "These all," say the accusers of Jason, "do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, that there is another King, one Jesus." It is a judicious remark of a learned writer on this passage—"How proper it was that our Lord should ascend, before his Disciples declare him to be *Lord* or King; when this accusation at Thessalonica, relating to a person in another world, and his kingdom, a *kingdom not of this world*, but merely a spiritual kingdom, could yet give offence to the

¹ Rom. xiii. 1.

higher powers, or at least afford matter of accusation against his Disciples¹." So consistent in all respects are the decrees of Providence, so necessary for accomplishing the great purposes of our Maker's will!

The Magistrates, having taken securities of the peace, of Jason and his Christian brethren, dismissed them. But they, fearful of any serious consequences to Paul and Silas, prudently and privately sent them away to Berea, another city of Macedonia at no great distance, where Timothy soon after joined them. The prospect here seemed to brighten around them. Their new friends appeared with cheerful countenances and reasonable minds. The doctrines which they had been taught in Scripture, they were induced to examine under new lights. They did not imagine that they had arrived at the perfection of knowledge, and consequently did not shut up the channel of further information; but being "more noble," that is, more ingenuous, more open to conviction than the Jews of Thessalonica, "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."—This is the very principle on which true Christianity is founded, and which peculiarly distinguishes the Church of England. The investigation of Scripture is a noble study, when it is not wrested to partial, or narrow purposes. Notwithstanding the various interpretations which the ingenuity, and sometimes, I fear,

¹ Benson in locum.

the wickedness of man, have given of it, still the Scripture itself speaks but *one language*, and that so plain, that the most uninformed may understand it. I do not say that there are no obscurities in Scripture. St. Peter himself acknowledges, that in the Epistles of a most valuable Apostle, “there are some things hard to be understood ¹.” But the terms of man’s salvation are fully, clearly, and unequivocally disclosed. “There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved ²,” but that of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This is the leading key to the whole book of Scripture. And if we find this knowledge, whatever we may miss besides, we shall be well rewarded for our search. Faith and practice are here essentially connected. We can, therefore, no more expect to go to heaven without the book of God in our hands, than we can move the earth on which we tread, without the communication of Omnipotence. “Seek ye out of the book of the Lord and read: no one of these [prophecies] shall fail; none shall want her mate, [all shall be accomplished:] for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them ³.”

Let us then remember, that if we would really profit by a perusal of the Scriptures, we must receive them with all *readiness of mind*, with an alacrity and earnestness becoming their importance. This disposition of mind will include prayer, and exclude rash judgment. Both indispensably ne-

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 16.² Acts iv. 12.³ Isa. xxxiv. 16.

cessary in the study of the Scriptures. Let the example of the Bereans induce us to be more diligent in the use of our Bibles. "They searched the Scriptures *daily*;" some part of every day was appropriated to this most valuable of all purposes; and they did not think that portion of their time misspent. Indeed, my Brethren, so well are all such moments employed, that we shall be glad to be found occupied in this study, when we are called home to our Father's house. When all earthly records are done away, and all frail memorials of men are sinking into oblivion, then shall the Word of God triumph. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever¹."

In consequence of these good dispositions of the Jews resident at Berea, many of them were converted; and the Church of Christ was further enlarged by the accession of many Grecian women of distinction, who had been proselytes of the gate, as well as by several men of the same description.

But St. Paul did not long enjoy this tranquillity of teaching. His Thessalonian enemies pursued him thither, and by means of another tumult, supported probably by the same suspicions, obliged him to accept the protection of his friends, and remove privately to the city of Athens. Silas and Timothy continued a short time longer at Berea, but receiving an invitation from St. Paul to follow him, we

¹ 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

have reason to believe that they did so as soon as possible. St. Luke himself not being at this time one of the company, is perhaps the cause of his not mentioning this circumstance in his history.

[A. D. 54.] We now find ourselves upon classic ground ; and if we feel that degree of warmth, which scenes, once animated by the presence of celebrated heroes and philosophers, cannot fail to inspire, will not its force be considerably increased, when we trace, upon the same soil, the footsteps of those holy men who preached the glad tidings of salvation ? In the account of St. Paul at Athens, every thing accords with the truth of history. In streets that have been frequently described, we meet with men of public characters which are well known. The gay disciple of Epicurus, and the severe professor of the Stoic philosophy, present themselves to our view. Even the manners of the common people are the same ; for when the sacred historian describes them as “ spending their time in telling or hearing some new thing,” do we not descry men of the same family delineated by Demosthenes, when he wishes to shame them into resistance ? “ We Athenians sit at home, doing nothing, always delaying and making decrees, and *asking in the forum if there be any thing new*¹.”

The forum, or market, among the Greeks, was not only used as a place of merchandize, but of holding public meetings, and of course of familiar conversation. Here it was that St. Paul first dis-

¹ In Philip. Orat. 1.

coursed with the philosophers, as well as with such Jews as he did not meet with at the Synagogue, and such proselytes as were then resident at Athens.

At his entrance into this celebrated city, the honest heart of the Apostle was moved with indignation, when he cast his eye on the multitude of heathen idols which were visible on every side. Temples, in the sublimest style of architecture, contained the most exquisite specimens of sculpture, fresh from the chisel of a Phidias, or Praxiteles. Unseduced by these beautiful productions of art, no way intimidated by the power or eloquence of the Athenian magistrates, and unconvinced by the sophistry of the philosophers, this great man stood singly forward, and opposed the prevailing worship of idols, however favoured ; offering a new, more rational, and infinitely more sublime object of belief.

The Epicureans and Stoics were his first opponents. The former held doubtful opinions about the existence of gods ; or, if there were any, they alleged that they were indolent inhabitants of the superior regions, regardless of human actions ; that pleasure was the chief good ; at the same time denying both a Providence, and a future state. The latter were proud followers of a blind fatality ; they held very inferior notions of a supreme Deity, and like too many modern sceptics, believed virtue to be its own reward, and vice its own punishment. How could men, who professed such principles as these, agree with him who would restrain the uncontrolled pleasures of the one, and the insufferable pride and arrogance of the other ? How could it

be expected, that men of these descriptions would easily be persuaded to renounce their own delusive ideas, and listen to the doctrines and precepts of a religion which was pure as purity itself; which combated all self-sufficient haughtiness of soul, and revealed One holy, Almighty, invisible Being, as the true object of adoration; as the Governor of this world, and the rewarder of holiness in the next? Which displayed an harmony between all the works of creation, and the wonders of divine love; that as these were given for the comfort and sustenance of man, a Redeemer who came from God, and who was God, was also bestowed upon the world to rescue men from sin and misery, and place them in a state of final felicity; lastly, a religion which accomplished these important ends by easy means, and offered to their souls a portion of the spirit of grace, which animates, enlivens, and by its gentle impulses (where not resisted), as it were, *impels* its votaries to accept the gracious terms of salvation.

Alas! this language was unintelligible to the wisest of the Athenian philosophers. Why? Because the vain imagination of their own superior wisdom blinded their eyes, and put a stop to all improvement. They derided the conversation of the holy Apostle, as if he were an idle talker in the market-place, a retailer of impertinent and foolish anecdote. They exclaim, "What can this babbler say?" What can this man mean, by bringing his new and indigested notions to us? Others said, "He is a setter forth of strange gods; for they

thought that *Jesus* and *the Resurrection* were two new gods which he designed to introduce into Athens. This was the offence for which, in this very place, a philosopher, of whom it has been said, that "among the good men he was the best, and among the wisest ones the wisest¹," in the Grecian schools of philosophy, suffered the punishment of death. St. Paul was arraigned before the same tribunal with Socrates, and for the same offence. The question then between them is now at issue. Examine their belief; consider their conclusions. Natural Religion, to take no notice of idolatry, stands on the one side, Revelation on the other. Whatever sound sense, rational principles, and an improved system of philosophy could do, might be expected from Socrates; what the Gospel promises, and what the Gospel performs, may be beheld in the doctrines, in the conduct, in the preaching of St. Paul. Socrates had talked so freely of the heathen deities, that he was summoned to answer for his fault before the highest court of judicature, the court of the Areopagites. Here he makes his defence, which has been transmitted to us by two of the most celebrated writers of antiquity, his own scholars, [Plato and Zenophon.] From this it appears, that he continued to the last a worshipper of the gods of his country, and that neither his great knowledge nor great abilities had delivered him from the grossest superstitions of

¹ Bp. Sherlock, V. i. Disc. 4. From which, a part of this parallel between Socrates and St. Paul is drawn.

idolatry. See then how far the wisdom of this world could go. Now, behold, what the *foolishness* of preaching could accomplish. We have here the greatest and ablest of the wise men of Greece, and an Apostle of Jesus Christ in nearly the same circumstances. We have heard the one; let us now attend to the other.

“ Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill,” in a conspicuous part of the court of the Areopagites, (we may imagine the boldness of his attitude¹, expressive of the sublimity of his thoughts) and addressed them in the language of their own orators, “ Men of Athens ! I perceive that in all things ye are *too superstitious*.” It has been observed, that this expression will bear a softer sense than our translation implies ; as much as to say, that in all things ye are pious and devout. Perhaps it may ; but as St. Paul’s *spirit was stirred within him* at the sight of their numerous idols, it is likely a certain degree of indignation would also accompany his expressions, not indeed such as to prejudice his hearers against the doctrines he was going to introduce, but to rouse their attention, and induce them to examine the truth of his assertions. *Too superstitious*, in our sense of the word, it cannot mean, as that apparently allows a certain degree of superstition. A learned and ingenious writer translates the expression, “ I see you in all things too full of Dæmons already’ ; and therefore it is super-

¹ See the celebrated Cartoon of Paul preaching at Athens.

² ὥς δεισιδαιμονεστερους. Mede’s Works, p. 635.

fluens for me to bring the worship of any more strange Daemons among you. No. I preach the living God who made the world.”—St. Paul very eloquently and ingeniously introduces the important truth by an allusion to an altar which he had beheld in his survey of the city, with this remarkable inscription, “To THE UNKNOWN GOD.” It is ascertained that altars with such a dedication were at that time not uncommon at Athens. Some have imagined that, as they received in this city the gods of all nations, by the *unknown God* may here be meant the God of the Jews. The Jews indeed paid particular reverence to the incommunicable name of Jehovah, which they abstained from uttering; and it is likely, if it had been understood by them that the inscription had this reference, they would have remonstrated against such an inscription on an heathen altar. The Apostle, however, from the acknowledgment that there was a God whom they did not know, proceeds to instruct them in the nature of *Him* whom they ought to know.

St. Paul’s judgment is manifest in his selection of topics for this animated discourse. He does not address the Athenian philosophers as he had the Jews, and infer that they ought to believe in Christ, because he had been foretold by the prophets; for they knew nothing of the prophets, or at least had no reverence for their writings, and as yet had no reason to believe them true; but he reverses the argument, and concludes, that they ought to regard the voice of revelation, because all its promises had been accomplished in Christ. “To

the Jew, prophecy was the first proof; to the Gentile, it was the last. The Jew believed in Christ, because foretold by the prophets; the Gentiles believed the prophets, because they had so exactly foretold Jesus Christ. Both became firm believers; having each in his way a full view of all the dispensations of Providence towards mankind¹."

Under this proper discrimination of character the Apostle proceeds to assert the existence and true essence of a supreme Being, as manifested in the works of creation, and particularly in that general relation which all men have to each other, as descendants from one common stock. He then condemns their idolatry; for if the world and all things in it were produced by the pleasure of One Almighty Being, he must, of consequence, be Himself unmade, eternal, and omnipresent. He reproves them for having deserted that witness which every where existed of this invisible but evident power, and which he affirms was not far from every one of them, in every age and under every climate. These sentiments he confirms, in condescension to their cultivated understandings, by quotations from their own poets. Passing over the times of ignorance, when God had sent no prophets, no messengers to the heathen world, he tells them what was *now* expected from them, that other times, and new messengers had arisen, when all, Heathen as well as Jew, were called to repentance, an essential branch of the revelation made by "that man whom God

¹ Sherlock on Prophecy, Disc. 6.

hath ordained to judge the world in righteousness." He does not require them to believe this on his own assertion, but refers them, as a notorious fact and evidence of the truth, to *the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*.

The Apostle, as we may imagine, was now proceeding to disclose, in a more full and comprehensive manner, the whole scope of Christianity, properly considering the resurrection of Christ as the key-stone of his argument ; but the impetuosity of his audience prevented him. A part of them, probably the Epicureans, who disbelieved the doctrine of a resurrection in every sense, turned his assertion into ridicule. They *derided* him ; the usual resource of those who cannot confute. Others, the Stoics, who thought a resurrection from the dead not wholly incredible, wished the Christian Orator to resume his discourse upon a future occasion. But notwithstanding the impenetrability of this learned assembly, a few converts, and those of rank and quality, were made amongst them ; namely, Dionysius, a judge of the court, a female named Damaris, and others with them.

When we have duly considered this sublime oration of St. Paul, and compared its strength of argument and salutary effects with the harangues of the ancient sages, and particularly with the defence of that philosopher who once addressed the same celebrated court, we may inquire " Which of these two was a preacher of true religion ? And we may call upon those who value human reason at the highest rate, to determine the point." This

comparison has been drawn by an able pen : I shall make no apology for deducing an important inference from it. Setting aside the idolatry of Socrates, which entirely prevented him from reproofing in others what he committed himself, “ his doctrines upon the subjects of divinity, and morality, were introduced into the world with all the advantage that the ablest, and politest, pens could give, and they became the study and entertainment of all the considerable men that lived after him. Yet what was the effect of all this ? Can you name the place where religion was reformed ? Can you name the man who was so far reformed as to renounce the superstition of his country ? No ; none such are to be found ; and how should there ? since the greater the credit and reputation of Socrates were, the more strongly did they draw men to imitate his example, and to worship as their country worshipped.”—“ Consider, on the other side, what was the consequence of preaching the Gospel. St. Paul entertained the Athenians with no fine speculations, but he laid before them, in the plainest dress, the great and momentous truths of religion ; he openly rebuked their idolatry, and condemned their superstition. The Gospel was preached in the same manner every where. The first preachers of it were enabled to support it by miracles, and most of them shed their blood in the defence of its truth. By these means they came likewise to have credit and authority in the world. But in these two cases there was this great difference ; the corrupt example of Socrates was a dead weight upon the purity of his doctrine, and tended to perpetuate

superstition in the world ; the authority and example of the Apostles went hand in hand, and united their force to root out idolatry. There was this farther difference too ; the doctrines of Socrates could go only among the learned ; the doctrines of the Gospel were artless and plain, and suited to every man's capacity."—" For near 400 years, (the time between the death of Socrates and the birth of Christ) the disciples of the former had the world to themselves, to reform it if they could ; in all which time there is no evidence remaining, that the religion of the world was the better for their wisdom. But in much less time the Gospel prevailed in most parts of the known world : wherever it came Superstition and Idolatry fled before it ; and, in little more than three centuries, the empire became Christian ; which completed the victory over the heathen deities¹."

Here then let us rest our argument, and let us reflect, that if the wisest of the heathen philosophers, with all his boasted reason, could not free himself, or his disciples, from the chain of superstition, how much more we ought to rejoice, who possess that " liberty with which Christ has made us free²." But in vain are we made members of a covenant of Grace, in vain are we put in possession of so many great and glorious privileges, if we employ them not to the noblest purposes : in vain are we allied to Heaven, if we satisfy ourselves with the humble, incompetent, and, too frequently, deceitful accommodations of the earth.

¹ Bp. Sherlock, Disc. 4. Vol. I.

² Gal. v. i.

LECTURE XVIII.

ACTS XVIII.

*St. Paul's second Apostolic Journey concluded. Corinth.—
Cenchrea. — Ephesus. — Cæsarea. — Jerusalem. — Antioch.
A. D. 54, 55, 56.*

THE productions of nature, when presented to the ordinary eye, exhibit a considerable degree of excellence and beauty ; but when they are examined by that extraordinary instrument of human invention, the microscope, every particle of matter, every spire of grass, rises into importance, and discovers a perfection which the most skilful artist could not have produced, the most scientific understanding could not have conceived. Apply this observation to the Holy Scriptures, and you will find that the greater the accuracy with which they are studied, the more minute the investigation which they undergo, the greater perfection will they be found to possess ; the higher will be our admiration, the more pure and refined our delight.

By examining accurately merely one book of Scripture, that, for instance, which now occupies our attention, I presume we shall be fully satisfied of this truth ; for, as we accompany the Apostles

in their travels, every place where they take up their temporary abode, every event, whether prosperous or adverse, which befalls them, brings with it new occasions of instruction, new motives of action, and an increase of knowledge, human and divine. The blessed founder of Christianity did not, like the Jewish legislator, present himself before us in a situation of eminence and dignity, and from a mountain, arrayed in dreadful magnificence, promulge a code of statutes written by the finger of the Almighty on visible tables of stone ; but he instituted a more spiritual worship, and propagated his mild and conciliating doctrines in a familiar manner, that the faith of the Christian should not stand in the “wisdom of men, but in the power of God¹.”

We have attended St. Paul through many interesting situations ; every one of which, I trust, has left some useful impression on our minds. As *faith* is the great object of our search, we cannot any where be more likely to attain it, than by taking St. Paul for our companion. His affectionate *greetings* to those who had been his children in the Lord, evince how much his heart was in his profession ; and we cannot doubt the soundness of *his* faith who was enabled to work miracles in proof of his Apostolic character, and whose life was a valuable commentary on his writings.

From Athens the Apostle came to Corinth, another considerable city of Greece, situated near

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 5.

the middle of the Isthmus, which divides that part of the continent of Europe, and communicates, by means of two ports, with the opposite seas. At this place of trade and opulence, he resided above a year and six months¹, and laid the foundation of a large society of Christians. The Synagogue, at first, was his usual place of instruction, and the Jews and Jewish proselytes his usual audience. Here he met with a converted Jew, a native of Pontus, named Aquila, with his wife Priscilla, who seems also to have been a Christian. They had lately been expelled from Rome by a general edict of the Emperor Claudius against the Jews, as having been concerned in various tumults; according to the Roman biographer, *at the instigation of one CHRESTUS*². That there was no person of that name, at that time, or any other, a popular leader of sedition at Rome, is very evident; neither is it less clear how the mistake, if it was one, arose.

¹ From hence, it is generally imagined, that St. Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, to whom he soon after transmitted the second; and also the Epistle to the Galatians. It does not come within the plan of these Lectures to notice at length the several valuable letters which were addressed by the Apostle to the converts of the different Churches planted, or visited by him. But it is recommended to the reader to peruse such Epistles as occur in order of time, and compare them with the incidents mentioned in the history of the Acts. In this study, he will find most ample and useful assistance in Dr. Paley's "*Horæ Paulinæ, or the Truth of the Scripture History of St. Paul evinced; by a comparison of the Epistles which bear his name, with the Acts of the Apostles, and with one another.*"

² Suetonii Claud. c. 25.

The majority of Christians, at that early age of the Church, being for the most part converts of the Jewish nation, were involved in the calamities which befel that people. This incidental observation, insignificant as it may appear, is another proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures; the fact being corroborated by the historic evidence of a profane author.

Aquila and Priscilla, it appears, were industrious traders, and of the same occupation with St. Paul. It is necessary to remark, that by the Jewish polity, every man, of whatever rank, was expected to be instructed in some manual employment. It was a saying among them worth repeating, that "if a man did not teach his son a trade, it was as if he taught him to be a thief." This opinion and practice occasioned trade to be thought an honourable, as well as useful, occupation. Though St. Paul was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, a lawyer of no small celebrity, still he was instructed in the trade of a tent-maker. In this nation, at least, we must applaud so valuable a custom. The extension of commerce has brought among us a great influx of wealth, certainly a dangerous and an alarming situation. But however detrimental it may, in some cases, have been to our morals, immorality and irreligion do not necessarily flow from the principle upon which trade is founded; and we have reason to know, that the spirit of trade has not damped, in many a noble instance, the spirit of charity¹; not

¹ I cannot forbear referring to the numerous munificent acts of national and individual beneficence, which, of late years, have

that charity which is purposely distributed to *cover a multitude of sins*, in the common acceptation of the expression, but as proceeding from the true genuine, evangelical nature of charity, from a pure and well-grounded faith. Long may such trade flourish ! and whilst we exchange the rich produce of our lands, and send forth our large and gallant fleets to every distant corner of the world, may we send forth at the same time that blessing, without which our flowing sails will expand themselves in vain, the rich blessings of the Gospel !

It will not then appear to have been any derogation from St. Paul's character, that he wrought sometimes at the occupation of a tent-maker.—Neither, from this instance, may any argument be drawn in favour of an abolition of an order of men, purposely and exclusively appropriated to minister in holy things. The Jewish and Christian Churches, in every age since the delivery of the law on mount Sinai, have concurred in the necessity of such an appointment. A difference in the arrangement of ecclesiastical establishments, perhaps, there may have been, according to times and circumstances, but there never has been any variation of sentiment respecting the utility or expediency of the order. St. Paul, at Corinth, and at other places, laboured in his occupation, before he had gained a congregation to support him, and, sometimes, that he

distinguished the ENGLISH MERCHANTS at LLOYD'S; the representatives, as it were, of that valuable body of men distributed throughout every quarter of the United Kingdom : especially during the war, consequent on the late Revolution in France, to which this note principally refers.

might not be burthensome to those that were unable to do so. But he never declined a necessary support when it was convenient for him to receive it, or for his children in the faith to bestow it upon him. “Even so, he says, hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel¹.” Indeed none who know the value of religion, and the necessity of communicating to others so inestimable a treasure, will controvert the decided opinion of the Apostle; and may none who hold so sacred a trust, apply it to base or unworthy purposes! May God grant his grace to all his ministers, to fulfil the duties of their high function with faithfulness and integrity!

Silas had been left at Berea, and Timothy had been sent back from Athens to Thessalonica. Both joined the Apostle at Corinth; and as soon as they arrived, he “was *pressed in spirit*, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” It would appear as if he had met with some particular opposition from the Jews, and found them less willing than the Greeks to believe his arguments. This roused the warm feelings of St. Paul, and gave a greater energy to his preaching. Still, however, they resisted; and the zealous advocate of Christ was obliged, by an expressive action, to decline all further intercourse with them. “He shook his garments, and said, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I go unto the Gentiles.” Not that he did not again preach the

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 14.

Gospel to the Jews, but being the accredited Apostle of the Gentiles, he resolved to make them the principal objects of his labours.

What greater calamity can befall mankind than to be deprived of the bread of heaven by the obstinacy of their own conduct? A prophet of God once addressed a mighty king, "For thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king¹." Another prophet addressed a similar admonition to the people, and their instructors: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee²." How gladly then should we accept the testimonies of divine wisdom, the blessed word of salvation, communicated in the Scriptures of truth, lest the dreadful judgment of *lack of knowledge* fall upon us!

The affairs of Christianity at Corinth began now to wear a more prosperous aspect. Though the Apostle had lost the favour of his brethren, the Jews of that place, and had departed from their Synagogue with a menace, he found a refuge in the house of Justus, a religious proselyte, which was near at hand; and made a convert of Crispus, who was the chief ruler of the Synagogue. "*Many* of the Corinthians also hearing, believed, and were baptized." Their conversion followed their instruction; and their conviction of the truth led them, by the appointed means, to join themselves to so blessed a society.

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 26.

² Hos. iv. 6.

At this period, it would appear as if the Apostle felt a dejection of mind, and an apprehension arising from the infirmity of human nature. This depression of spirit does not proceed from a dereliction of divine grace, but, in many cases, that the grace of God might be more fully displayed. God does not over-rule the will of his servants, but places them in such situations of trial, as may make manifest the influences of his Spirit. This is no reflection on St. Paul's character. Many holy men have experienced this melancholy of mind, which in general has been followed by the succours of heavenly consolation. "When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo ! an horror of great darkness fell upon him ¹." This apprehension of the patriarch was immediately succeeded by a divine revelation. In the book of Job, Eliphaz, the Temanite, describes a similar impression of mind. "In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men. Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a Spirit passed before my face, the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof ; an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God ? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker ² ?" Here the revelation of a moral truth followed the impressive vision. Pious David felt the same uneasiness, and received the same

¹ Gen. xv. 12.

² Job iv. 13—17.

comfort. “ My heart is disquieted within me, and the fear of death is fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and an horrible dread hath overwhelmed me.” But piety restores him from this truly pitiable condition. “ I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. In the evening and morning, and at noon-day, will I pray, and that instantly, and he shall hear my voice¹.” In the midst of similar tumults of the spirit, the Apostle receives ample encouragement from his heavenly Master. “ Then spake the Lord to Paul in a vision by night, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city.” As every man may be overtaken by melancholy impressions of mind, it should be his constant care to refer them to their proper source. Bodily indisposition may sometimes produce them, and sometimes they are appointed as trials of our faith and patience. Avert such melancholy moments of depression, by propitiating the Almighty with all the warmth and sincerity of prayer. Our blessed Lord did so in his agony in the garden, and his Father sent an angel from heaven to strengthen him. If we are sometimes induced to exclaim in the sorrow and dejection of our hearts, “ Why art thou so heavy, O my soul? And why art thou so disquieted within me?” Let us reply to ourselves in the language of religious confidence—“ O put thy trust in God; for I

¹ Psalm lv. 4, 5, 17, 18.

will yet give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance and my God ¹." Thus supported by an heavenly vision, the Apostle continued the exercise of his mission, for a year and six months, with considerable success.

About this time a momentary interruption was given to St. Paul's teaching. His enemies, the Jews, made a tumult, as they had done in other places, and brought him before the judgment-seat of Gallio, then proconsul of Achaia. The character of Gallio is not unknown in history, and remarkably coincides with this narrative of St. Luke. He is represented as a man of conciliating manners, and great goodness of disposition. From the best authorities, he is supposed to have been the elder brother of Seneca, the celebrated Roman moralist, and preceptor of Nero; and, probably, by his interest, and his own conduct, he had risen to the flattering situation of governor of a Grecian province.

The accusation at present brought against the Apostle was, that he taught a mode of worship contrary to the law of Moses. When Paul was just beginning to reply to this charge, he was checked by the proconsul, who disclaimed all jurisdiction in this affair. The conduct of Gallio, on this occasion, has met with applause, or censure, according to the different opinions of those who have examined it. Some think that he should immediately have decided the question according to the authority which they imagine him to have pos-

¹ Psalm. xliii. 5, 6.

sessed. Other exclaim, "Would to God that all princes, judges, and magistrates, had always been of Gallio's mind! and discouraged such tumults by protecting the innocent, and punishing the *persecutors*! and so left every one to judge for himself in matters of religion, which concern only God, and a man's own conscience¹." Whatever may be the opinion of individuals, the true reason why Gallio dismissed the present question appears to be, not because the civil magistrate had nothing to do with subjects of religion, for it is well known that the affairs of religion were always a principal part of the care of the Roman magistrates and Senate, the Emperor himself assuming the title and character of Pontifex Maximus; but because the Senate and Emperors had, by various decrees, and particularly the then reigning Emperor Claudius, allowed the Jews, every where under their dominions, to govern themselves, according to their own laws, in matters of religion. This being the case, the pro-consul esteemed it not of his cognizance; "*therefore*," says he, "I will be no judge of such matters²." Had you accused this man of injustice and violence against individuals, or of crimes against the state, I would willingly have heard you; but of your religious disputes, I am, and will be, no judge. And he drove them, he dismissed them not without some degree of resentment, from the judgment-seat."

If Gallio had no legal jurisdiction with respect to

¹ Benson, Vol. II. p. 146.

² Biscoe, p. 59.

the Jews (which appears to have been the case) his conduct was fully justifiable in dismissing this question. But a man may act wrong, even in a right cause. Here we begin to perceive the prevalence of his natural disposition. His courteous behaviour shewed itself towards the powerful party; he acted with unnecessary harshness and severity to the prisoner. The honest upright magistrate is of no party; he hears with patience, and decides with fidelity.

When the inhabitants of Corinth, persons different from those which had apprehended Paul, saw the easy disposition of the chief magistrate, they took the law into their own hands, and beat Sosthenes, the chief ruler of another synagogue, in the very presence of Gallio. Surely now the pro-consul will interpose his authority, and rescue innocence from the hand of oppression? No. "Gallio cared for none of these things." Though he stand acquitted of indolence in the case of St. Paul, he is fully convicted of a tame, time-serving, and criminal forbearance, with respect to the ruler of the Synagogue.

The quality of good-nature, all amiable as it is, degenerates into worse than weakness, when it is misapplied. In its more perfect state, it is a blessing to that heart which it can call its own. It is an emanation of the most exquisite part of the Christian character, proceeding immediately from that "wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be in-

treated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy¹." But an affectation of this benevolent disposition must always be met with contempt. If it feel no tender compassion for human woe, if it feel no generous resentment at the prospect even of grievous offences, if it be inclined to pass over faults to prevent the trouble of punishing or reproving them, if its great object be to court popularity at all events, and to smile where honest integrity would weep ; away with such good-nature, it is destitute of those striking marks which constitute its genuine character, and which convert a moral virtue into an evangelical grace.

Beware then of that easy indolence of temper, that *good-hearted* disposition, which the world is apt to admire. Startle not at the expression ; for, on strict examination, it will be found, that no man is in greater danger than he who, in common language, is said to possess a *good heart*. A good moral character indeed must at all times be amiable, but it has no stability, if it be not founded on Gospel principles. Gallio deserved no censure, perhaps, when he dismissed Paul from his judgment-seat ; but what shall we say of Gallio when he permitted an innocent man to be insulted and ill-treated in his presence ? His moral character, which remained untainted in the one instance, suffered justly the reprehension of the historian in the other. There

¹ James iii. 17.

was no consistency in his conduct. Why ? “ Gallio *cared for none* of those things.”

Let us make *our* use then of these reflections. The spirit of Christianity gives a *decided* character to a Christian. He acts only upon one principle. He would not offend his neighbour ; but he cannot disobey his God. He is a friend, an universal friend, to man ; but he is no friend to vicious indulgence of any kind. He is courteous and condescending ; but flatters no man’s evil propensities, or his crimes. In dutiful submission, and in true humility of mind, he is exemplary and eminent ; but, when he is called upon to *confess his Master*, by an open declaration of his faith, or by personal sufferings ; when it becomes his duty to stand in the breach of wickedness, and oppose the encroachments of sin in every rank or station ; then “ the righteous man is as bold as a lion¹.” What then is that solid, uniform, principle which produces such happy consequences ? St. Paul, who was all I have described, shall tell us. “ I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live—[I was dead unto sin, but am alive unto righteousness—] yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me².”

In consequence of the security in which St. Paul now found himself at Corinth, he prolonged his residence at that place. “ He tarried there yet a

¹ Prov. xxviii. 1.

² Gal. ii. 20.

good while," and made many converts. He then prepared for a voyage into Syria, from whence he had departed, and took with him his two pious friends, Aquila and Priscilla. Before he sailed, he shaved his head at Cenchrea, the sea-port of Corinth, on account of a vow which he had made, where also he laid the foundation of a Christian Church. Some commentators, from a supposed grammatical construction, have attributed this circumstance to Aquila, but as we know that St. Paul, for particular purposes, occasionally conformed to the injunctions of the law, there appears to be no sufficient reason why that might not be the case at present. "He became a Jew that he might gain the Jews;" and there was nothing in his compliance with this Jewish ordinance, contrary to his profession as a follower of Christ.

On what occasion the Apostle made this vow remains doubtful. It appears to have been what was known under the law by the vow of the Nazarete; so called from the Hebrew word ¹, which signifies to separate, as it required the person, under the influence of the vow, to *separate himself unto the Lord*. It was an high act of devotion; of what nature, the abstinence he was required to practise sufficiently explains. "He shall separate himself from wine, and from strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord ²." The outward ceremony was expressive of his inward purity. Rash vows, or vows

¹ נָזַר separavit.

² Numb. vi. 2.

which have no religious end in view, may be considered as trifling in a serious matter, or indeed, in many instances as *taking the name of the Lord our God in vain*; but vows, which are intended to fulfil a moral or a religious duty (which will exclude all superstitious vows of celibacy, mortification, or seclusion, as in themselves meritorious in the sight of God) must always be considered as sacred, and implicitly obeyed. “If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, and swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break (the expression is, he shall not profane) his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth¹.” The Nazarite’s vow in no way attaches itself to us. But the spirit of it may be still applied to Christians. Like the Nazarites of old, the true followers of Christ are *separated* from the customs and practices of a wicked world; they are consecrated to God in baptism by a still more holy vow, a vow more irreversible than that of the Nazarites themselves; a vow, to renounce the great enemies of man, the world, the flesh, and the devil; a vow, to remain steadfast in that holy faith to which we have been called in Christ; a vow of obedience to *continue in the same unto our lives’ end*. If the Nazarite was enjoined to “eat nothing that is made from the vine tree;” the Christian cannot but see the greater propriety of binding himself by a solemn resolution to a serious and holy temperance, to a general sobriety of conduct, to an abstinence from all things that might tempt him to profane his Christian obligations, or

¹ Numb xxx. 2.

remove that distinction of character which points him out as a faithful servant of the Gospel.

It would not be unprofitable to us to consider this season of Lent as an appointed time for fulfilling *our* Nazarite's vow. It is, or ought to be, according to the injunctions of a wise and judicious Church, sanctioned by the experience of ages, a season of holy separation from the world. Let us use it with piety and improvement. Our allotted days, thus employed, will bring us acquainted with our own hearts; and our vow will be fully performed when we enter into God's rest on the happy morning of the resurrection,

When St. Paul had crossed the sea, he came to Ephesus, a very celebrated city in Asia Minor. Though his time was short (as he wished, probably for his vow's sake, to be at Jerusalem at the ensuing feast) yet no portion of his valuable life was to be lost. "He entered into the Synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews." His doctrine was received with joy, and he was intreated to prolong his residence among them. Neither did the Apostle disregard so promising an harvest. "I will return again to you, said he, if the Lord will." *If the Lord will*—The pious mind makes no resolutions, without a reliance on the providence of God, being either implied or expressed. We know not what a day may bring forth, and therefore on all occasions it is presumption to talk incautiously of futurity. "For what is our life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Therefore, says another Apostle,

we ought to say, *if the Lord will*, we shall live, and do this, or that¹.”

After leaving Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus, St. Paul re-embarked, and landed at Cæsarea, a sea-port of Palestine, and from thence went up, and saluted the *Church*, that is, the Church of Jerusalem, so called by way of eminence. Here he performed his vow, and, probably, without much delay, went down to Antioch, thus concluding his second Apostolic journey.

During St. Paul's absence from Ephesus, that city was visited by a person of high attainments in theological learning, but who had not, as yet, been made acquainted with the full revelation of Jesus Christ. Apollos, a Jew by birth, a native of Alexandria, possessed a natural flow of eloquence, and more than a competent degree of knowledge in the Jewish scriptures. Notwithstanding the boldness of his preaching, the pious converts, Aquila and Priscilla, perceived his ignorance in many essential points, both of fact and doctrine; for he “knew only the baptism of John.” They proceeded, therefore, with great piety, and great good-nature, to “expound unto him the way of God more perfectly.” Happy are we, when such friends undertake to instruct us. Let us all entertain humble notions of our own abilities; for whatever degree of knowledge we may arrogate to ourselves, or may actually possess, let us remember we have still much to learn. Eternity only can fully display

¹ James iv. 15.

this truth ; for there only can we “see God as he is, and know Him even as we are known¹.”

Apollos, afterwards a celebrated disciple of the Gospel, was recommended by the Ephesian brethren to those of the Church planted by St. Paul at Corinth. At this place he manifested his improvements in religious knowledge ; “he helped them much, which had believed through grace.” His countrymen were greatly benefited by the instruction he communicated ; for “he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures (with which he was so conversant) that Jesus was *the Christ*.”

This was the great doctrine for which all the Apostles laboured ; and they laboured not in vain. “I have planted, (says St. Paul) Apollos watered, but God gave the increase².” Such was the mode of establishment, and such the progress, of the Christian Church. And “because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it, O Lord, evermore by thy help and goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen³.”

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

² 1 Cor. iii. 6.

³ 16th Sunday after Trinity.

LECTURE XIX.

ACTS XIX. 1—20.

St. Paul's third Apostolic Journey.—The Countries of Galatia and Phrygia.—The City of Ephesus. A. D. 56—58.

HAD human means been the only means made use of to propagate the religion of Jesus, notwithstanding the inadequate causes assigned for its success by the insidious author of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, it must inevitably have sunk before the arts of an interested philosophy, or fallen a sacrifice to the violence of wordly opposition. We cannot view St. Luke's account of the first settlement of the Gospel, in the various countries, which are the objects of his history, without being struck with this circumstance. For what reasonable end could have induced any one man, much less vast multitudes of persons, in populous and highly civilized cities, to have embraced the holy doctrine of the Cross, if it had not been supported by supernatural help? Paul might have preached and travelled unnoticed and unattended, if he had not been able to have convinced his hearers that his commission was from above : and how could his hearers have been

thus convinced, if he had not directed them to the miracles, and wonders, and signs, which his Lord and master had done, and which his immediate disciples were enabled to do; and to compare them with those records of the Divine Will, which, from time to time, had been delivered by the Prophets? Had the visible effusion of the Spirit alone been withheld, the effect of conversion would have been confined to few. But why should we imagine a situation, which the Almighty thought not fit to adopt? It is not our business on such points to reason, but to obey.

The energy with which the Apostle of the Gentiles undertook his mission, prevents us from feeling any lassitude in being the companions of his travels. How indeed should that be the case, when we are every moment listening to his animated discourses, following him into every Synagogue, and attending him at every tribunal? He himself was the willing pupil, the indefatigable follower, of his own instructions. “Let us not be weary in well-doing. As we have opportunity, let us do good unto *all men*¹.” No sooner had he completed one journey upon this truly catholic principle, than he undertook another. He allowed himself no interruption in his religious duties; and it was not till much later in life, when he had his martyrdom in view, that he said in the spirit of Christian resignation, “*I have finished my course*².”

We once more set forward with St. Paul from

¹ Gal. vi. 9, 10.

² 2 Tim. iv. 8.

Antioch in Syria, where we left him, on his third apostolic journey. . The account is very short of the first part of his travels, but comprehends a vast extent of country, as well as a large harvest of converts. “ He went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia, in order, strengthening all the Disciples¹.” The Historian was equally concise, when he mentioned St. Paul’s former visit to these regions. It now appears that he had planted Churches as he had travelled, and had converted a considerable number of the inhabitants. In this journey he makes a regular visitation of his infant Churches; with which, as we find in his Epistle to the Galatians, he had great reason to be satisfied. He delicately refers to his personal uneasiness and afflictions, when he first appeared among them as their teacher, and mentions, with great feeling, their strong affection for him. “ Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh, I preached the Gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation, which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected, but ye received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where then is the blessedness that you spoke of? (What was then your happiness?) For I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes (ye would have deprived yourselves of the dearest things ye had) and would have given them to me².” How delightful to visit friends thus sensible of the value of his friendship! How grateful

¹ Chap. xviii. 23.

² Gal. iv. 13, 14, 15.

to a faithful pastor to receive such proofs of attachment, as they are irrefragable evidences, that the dew of heaven has not fallen on an unkindly soil !

When he had thus passed through “ the upper coasts,” the Apostle, according to his promise, came down to Ephesus, and proceeded immediately with an earnestness and solemnity becoming his character, to enquire into the spiritual state of all the members of the Church. The manner in which he made this inquiry, and his proceedings on the occasion, have afforded a model for future visitations of the same nature. This in Scripture language, has been called *strengthening, setting in order,* and, when accompanied by the *laying on of hands, confirming* the Disciples. Apollos, as we have seen, had departed for Corinth ; but several persons had, in the mean time, arrived at Ephesus, possessing, like Apollos at *his* arrival, a very imperfect knowledge of Christianity. Finding certain Disciples, he said unto them, “ Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ?”—An important question ! They formed part of the society of Christians ; of course it might reasonably be expected that they were in possession of spiritual gifts. Let all who think themselves believers, attend awfully to this inquiry, “ Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ?”—And they said unto him, “ We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” On the first view, this passage appears to be very obscure, or or very inconsistent ; as it is not likely that any Jew who must have known the Scriptures, or any Gen-

tile, who had in any sense been admitted a *disciple* of the Gospel, could be ignorant of this necessary part of his religion. St. Paul himself thought so ; for he immediately inquires with some surprise, “ Unto what then were ye baptised ? ”—The truth is, that they were the visible operative works of the Spirit, of which they were ignorant. On the day of Pentecost these extraordinary gifts were first imparted. Those, therefore, who knew Christianity only in its preparatory state, before that period, remained unacquainted with its miraculous effects. “ Unto what then, said the Apostle, where ye baptised ? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.” This sufficiently explains the nature of the answer of the Baptist’s disciples to St. Paul. As if they had said, “ We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost has been *yet given*.” The promise of the Prophet, perhaps, they well knew, that “ In the last days God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh ; ” but that these days were actually arrived they knew not ; for they were well assured, that they had not themselves received any portion of these gifts of the Spirit, and it is probable they had not been in any situation where these holy communications could have been brought to their knowledge. This interpretation may fairly be deduced from an observation of St. John the Evangelist, on an expression in one of our Saviour’s discourses. “ He that believeth on me,” saith our Lord, “ as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.—This,” says St. John, “ spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him

shall receive ; for the Holy Ghost *was not yet*, that is, was not yet *given*, because that Jesus was not yet glorified ¹.”

St. Paul then proceeds to explain to these Disciples the difference between John's Baptism, and that of Jesus Christ. Those who were partakers of John's Baptism were *so far* in the way of salvation. John baptized with the baptism of repentance for the remission of actual sin ; but his baptism implied only the *expectation* of Him who was to come after him, who should baptize them with the Holy Ghost, and with fire (an expression denoting its spiritual and purifying nature) and which baptism, through the grace communicated by it, should take away the guilt of *original sin* itself, should remove the stain of human nature, and impress the holy image of a new creation on the soul. John himself makes the same distinction : “ I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but he - - shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire ².” The end of this baptism, he explained in no equivocal language, when he pointed out the person and character of Him who had lately submitted to his baptism. “ John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world ³ ! ”—Remark the expression, “ the *sin* of the world,” that is, the great comprehensive sin, arising from the general corruption of human nature ; including, in fact, both actual and original sin ; which nothing but the blood of Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, can expiate.

¹ John vii. 38, 39.

² Matt. iii. 11.

³ John i. 29.

That the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit were those to which these twelve disciples of St. John allude, is evident from the effects of St. Paul's instruction. On being made acquainted with the full declaration of the Gospel concerning Him, whom they so imperfectly knew, "they were baptized in, or rather¹ *into* the name of the Lord Jesus; that is, not in his name alone, but into his name, including all the blessed Persons of the Trinity, concerned in the creation, redemption, and sanctification of the world.

It was necessary for the first establishment of the Church of Christ, that visible effusions of the Spirit should take place, and that extraordinary gifts of an *outward* nature, should be given unto men. But these were not the only, or most important, effects of Baptism. These early communications of the Spirit were in general conferred for the sake of *others*. Healing diseases, speaking with tongues, and similar gifts, were of a special nature, and indeed might be employed by those whose hearts did not feel the force of every sanctifying grace. But the *internal* operations of the Spirit communicated in baptism, and diligently improved by the true believer, accomplish in the human heart, those great and valuable effects, which naturally flow from so important a cause. His mind, his affections, the habits of his body, the propensities of his soul, are all changed. He becomes "as those that are alive from the dead; as those

¹ Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα.

that are not under the law, but under grace¹." Baptism is not therefore an unproductive ceremony, an admission merely of a member into the Christian Church; but the administration of it, according to the express establishment of Christ himself, the usage of the primitive Apostles, and the uniform and uninterrupted practice of the Church in all ages, communicates great and ineffable benefits; it confers the spiritual life through faith in Christ; it engages us by a solemn covenant to spiritual obedience, and places us in an actual state of salvation.

Helpless infants are equally entitled to these benefits of baptism with persons of the maturest age.—"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not²," said our Lord. Lydia and *her household*, the jailor with *all his*, including, probably, young, as well as old, were admitted to baptism by St. Paul. If there were no other argument, the injunction of circumcision on the eighth day would imply the expediency of infant baptism. This difference indeed there must be between infants and adults in the duty of baptism, that if the former, when they come to years of discretion, do not accede to those terms upon which they have been adopted into the body of Christ's Church, they may *quench the Spirit* which has been thus benevolently communicated, and fall from the grace of the Gospel; for in the administration of baptism, it is not "the washing away of the filth of the flesh,"

¹ Rom. vi. 13.

² Mark x. 14.

tile, who had in any sense been admitted a *disciple* of the Gospel, could be ignorant of this necessary part of his religion. St. Paul himself thought so ; for he immediately inquires with some surprise, “ Unto what then were ye baptised ? ”—The truth is, that they were the visible operative works of the Spirit, of which they were ignorant. On the day of Pentecost these extraordinary gifts were first imparted. Those, therefore, who knew Christianity only in its preparatory state, before that period, remained unacquainted with its miraculous effects. “ Unto what then, said the Apostle, where ye baptised ? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.” This sufficiently explains the nature of the answer of the Baptist’s disciples to St. Paul. As if they had said, “ We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost has been *yet given*.” The promise of the Prophet, perhaps, they well knew, that “ In the last days God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh ; ” but that these days were actually arrived they knew not ; for they were well assured, that they had not themselves received any portion of these gifts of the Spirit, and it is probable they had not been in any situation where these holy communications could have been brought to their knowledge. This interpretation may fairly be deduced from an observation of St. John the Evangelist, on an expression in one of our Saviour’s discourses. “ He that believeth on me,” saith our Lord, “ as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.—This,” says St. John, “ spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him

shall receive ; for the Holy Ghost *was not yet*, that is, was not yet *given*, because that Jesus was not yet glorified¹.”

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¹ John vii. 38, 39.

² Matt. iii. 11.

³ John i. 29.

the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied." The imposition of hands was the outward means of confirming the graces of baptism, and conferring powers suitable to their situation and station in the Church of Christ. That every thing may be progressive in a Christian's salvation, and corresponding in all respects with his age and condition, our Church adopts this salutary method of strengthening her young disciples, in the Office of Confirmation. No ceremony can be more impressive than this, if we except the Baptism of Adults; for now the full vigour of understanding is beginning to unfold, the great benefit of salvation by Christ is clearly and emphatically displayed before the youthful scholar of the Gospel, and the beneficial covenant of Grace accepted, in his own person, and in the very bosom of that holy Church, which his sound judgment, and mature faculties are induced to adopt. Whatever knowledge was imperfect in a state of childhood, whatever trace of the corruption of nature remained upon the soul, all is now dissipated by the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost¹." This is the true state of a regenerated son of the Church. She does not go so far as to say, that every adopted member of a Christian congregation is in this state, but it is implied in all her offices, prayers, and exhortations, that he *ought* to be so. Nothing but a sound faith can produce a holy practice. Even this cannot be preserved pure

¹ 1 Tit. iii. 5.

in this world of imperfection, without continual supplies of divine Grace ; and therefore we should unite our supplications with those of the Church, that “ we being regenerate, and made the children of God by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by his Holy Spirit ¹.”

After this transaction with the disciples of John, the Apostle continued his instruction for three months in the Jewish Synagogue, warmly, and with unabated zeal, “ disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God ;” rationally discussing this important question ; answering every cavil, displaying every argument, and using every proper means of persuasion to advance the interests of his great Master. But in vain did he display his eloquence, or his reasonings, because they were delivered to *hardened and unbelieving* souls : unbelieving, because hardened ; a state of danger which should rouse the most impenetrable sinner. The people may forsake the minister, but the faithful minister will never desert his flock. When he finds the word of exhortation void and ineffectual, he will change his ground, and try every method, within his power, to win them to his purpose. If new obstacles arise, he still persists, and administers the milk of the word to the faithful few that know its value.

When ² St. Paul could make no impression on a considerable part of his hearers, who not only refused his friendly offices, but *spake evil of that holy*

¹ Collect for Christmas Day.

² A.D 57.

way of salvation *before the multitude*, seducing them to continue in a dangerous state of infidelity, he *separated the disciples* from such an unsanctified society; and *taught for two years* in a private place of instruction, the *school of Tyrannus*; where all who dwelt in Asia, and occasionally resorted to Ephesus, the metropolis of the country, whether they were Jews resident in that part of Greece, or natives, might have an opportunity of hearing the whole revelation of the will of God, here emphatically called "*the word* of the Lord Jesus ¹."

To confirm this holy word, the Apostle wrought many miracles at Ephesus; not only healing the diseases of persons present, but, in order to induce the absent to make enquiries after the Gospel, the same blessing was communicated to them by the garments which were sent from the body of the Apostle.

We learn in several passages of the Epistles, that the Apostles were enabled to perform miracles at most, if not at all, the places which they visited; though in the concise history of St. Luke, not many of them are particularly noticed. At this place a singular occurrence is recorded, which tended greatly to magnify the name of Jesus, and further

¹ It is generally believed, that St. Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus. "I will tarry *at Ephesus* until Pentecost." 1 Cor. xvi. 8. The Church at Corinth had sent three messengers, Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, with a letter, desiring the Apostle's opinion on certain questions of doctrine and discipline, by whom he returned this answer.

the ministry of Paul¹. Certain vagabond Jews, who made a trade of imposition, and pretended to expel Evil Spirits, took upon themselves to support their imposture by an imitation of Paul's miracles. They observed that, by the great and awful name of JESUS these wonderful miracles were performed, and therefore they presumed to imitate so illustrious an example. Seven sons of Sceva, one of the chief of the family of the Priests, were among those who "called over them which had Evil Spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth."—That name, *which is above every name*, was prostituted to an unworthy purpose. To use it lightly or irreverently, to employ it on any occasion of impiety, to cover our sin, or cloak our hypocrisy, is to bring upon us the judgment of those who *take the name of the Lord our God in vain*.—The Evil Spirit, whom these men adjured in the name of Jesus, answered, and said, "Jesus, I *acknowledge*², and Paul I know, but who are ye? Instead of obeying their imperious and assumed command, the possessed person, after acknowledging the power and authority of Christ, fell upon the men, and obtained a complete triumph over them³. Thus does God make mani-

¹ A.D. 58.² Γινώσκω. Wogan in locum.³ In the New Testament, where any circumstances are added concerning the Dæmoniacks, they are generally such as shew that there was something preternatural in the distemper; for these disordered persons agreed in one story, and paid homage to Christ and his Apostles, which is not to be expected from madmen. One reason for which the divine Providence should permit Evil Spirits

fest his righteous servants, even in the midst of an unbelieving world. “With his own right hand, and with his holy arm, hath he gotten himself the victory¹.”

The Historian finishes the account of this occurrence by appealing for its truth to the voice of public fame. “This was *known* to *all* the Jews, and Greeks also, dwelling at Ephesus.” An argument here arises of considerable weight, which has been thus considered by a celebrated writer on the history of the Acts. “Ephesus was a large and populous city. The things here related are spoken as publicly done, and *known to all*. They were of such a nature, as to excite curiosity and attention, and they happened not above seven or eight years before the Acts of the Apostles were published. Is it possible to conceive that the Christian Church at Ephesus could receive a book relating such events, if they had not been well known facts? And if the Church of Ephesus received this book within eight years after these things are said to have happened, is not the consequence obvious? Must it not have put an entire stop to Christianity in all that country, (which we know was not the case) had not the facts been true? But suppose this book was not received in the Church of Ephe-

so much at that time, might be to give a check to Sadduceism among the Jews, and to Epicurean Atheism among the Gentiles, and to remove, in some measure, these two great impediments to the reception of the Gospel. Jortin's Rem. on Eccl. Hist. Vol. I. p. 14.

¹ Psalm xcvi. 2.

sus for *sixty* years after the event; and we know that long before that period it was considered as a book of sacred authority; must there not have been many persons living at that time who remembered them? What! not many persons who could look back in so large a city as Ephesus? Possibly there might be some living whom Paul healed. But if there were not, it is most certain there must have been many, very many, who knew them, and conversed with them. At all events, as many in Ephesus at this period gave credit to these Christian miracles, even when contrary to their interests, and at the hazard of their lives, we must conclude that the narrative is true ¹."

The effect of this transaction, by which the instruments of these Exorcists were turned upon themselves, was wonderful: "many that believed, came and confessed, and shewed their deeds." The impression of a sound faith produced the happy consequences of a sincere repentance. The penitent, fully convinced of sin, and finding no refuge but in *Him whom Paul preached*, resorts to the faithful minister of Christ, and makes open confession of his fault. More ashamed of guilt than of an ingenuous declaration, he brings forth his evil deeds, and lays them all at the foot of the Cross. Many are willing to confess their faults, many are even sorry for their offences, who yet stop short in the way of salvation. Sorrow and confession are indeed admirable symptoms of repentance, but they are no

¹ Biscoe, p. 552.

certain signs of a true conversion. The criminal, at the bar of human justice, confesses his offence. So far the power of conscience prevails. But will this confession acquit the prisoner? By no means. Sentence of condemnation must ensue. His only hope is in the mercy of his judge. To obtain evangelical mercy, we must make use of evangelical means. We must not only *shew* our *evil deeds*, but we must renounce them. We must look to him only who became a real sacrifice for our faults, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness ¹.”

The Ephesian converts appear to have attained this true conversion: for we find that they immediately sacrificed every thing that had contributed to their former offences, however valuable, or however dear. “Many of them also, which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men.” Here a scene of iniquity is indeed disclosed. Ephesus had been long infamous, as the residence of those who practised magical arts; so much so, that particular diabolical incantations have been called *Ephesian charms*. I need not repeat what has been before said on the subject in the case of Simon, the sorcerer. The general practice is sufficiently known from the number and value of the books of magic which were destroyed on this occasion.—“And they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver!!!”

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

Whatever interpretation may be given to these *curious arts*, which the new converts at Ephesus voluntarily relinquished, there is a sense in which we are all concerned. Wicked men, past all doubt, are the servants of the Devil. “He that committeth sin,” says St. John, “is of the Devil *.” What devastation the works of the Devil have made in the fair frame of nature, is too evident! The delusions of the prince of the power of the air are deeply rooted in the human heart. His *curious arts* are spread before us under many alluring appearances, that we may be “taken captive by him at his will².” From every day’s experience we are made sensible, that these *arts* are such as we do not always suspect. They appear sometimes under one shape, sometimes under another. They glide into the mind in every seducing form, and the heart is frequently polluted, before the understanding perceives its danger. The bad principles of books, the bad principles of companions, the bad principles of public spectacles, and even sometimes of private assemblies, thus insinuate themselves into unsuspecting breasts. The poison imperceptibly spreads itself into every limb, till the whole frame becomes paralyzed and destroyed. This is an enchantment, this a witchcraft for which perhaps none of us are prepared. There is but one remedy. The Magicians of Ephesus sought it, and were healed. The Scripture thus explains it. “*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy*

¹ 1 John iii. 8.² 2 Tim. ii. 26.

*the works of the Devil*¹.” They sought Christ, and they found forgiveness.

No partial accession to the Christian cause took place at this period of its history. Every day increased its friends, every hour produced its converts. The rapidity with which the great Author of Christianity was made known, in the very remote regions visited by the Apostles, was no less than miraculous. The more populous the region, the more abundant the harvest. At Ephesus the conversions were both numerous and effectual. “Ye see and hear,” said an Ephesian, (who will be noticed hereafter, no friend to the cause of Christianity) “that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded, and turned away much people.” The Sacred historian himself appears satisfied with the progress of the Gospel. He concludes the section, as it were, with his cordial approbation of its success; “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed!”

If we, my brethren, possess any cordial and sympathetic feelings with the Historian of the Acts of the Apostles, if we are animated by the accession of every convert to the blessed religion of our Master, if we are interested in the narrative, and dwell with rapture and delight on every holy scene as it passes before our eyes; let us go on one step further and become actors on the same stage. Let *the word of God grow mightily* in our own hearts, and *prevail* against the world, the flesh, and the Devil,

¹ 1 John iii. 8.

which lurk within us, to betray us. If we put ourselves under this guide, we shall be *more than conquerors* ; for we shall experimentally find, that they that be *for* us, will be stronger than those that are *against* us.—Propagate the religion of Christ within your breasts, and the gracious promises of the Gospel shall refresh your souls.—“ Fear not, O Jacob, my servant, and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground ; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses ¹. ”

¹ Isa. xliv. 2, 3, 4.

LECTURE XX.

ACTS XIX. 21. XX. 1—6.

St. Paul's third Apostolic Journey continued. Ephesus.—Macedonia.—Greece.—[Corinth.]—Troas. A. D. 59, 60.

WHEN we view the characters and conduct of the Apostles at the distance of time in which we stand, and contemplate the various fortunes of Christianity in different ages and countries, the mind is impressed with a deep solemnity of thought, and an overwhelming sense of the awful providence of God. As our ways are not as his ways, and our thoughts as his thoughts, it necessarily follows that there must be many circumstances and events, inscrutable by human understanding, the causes of which are not only perfectly clear to the foreknowledge of God, but perfectly consistent with the free-will which he hath implanted in man. If this then be allowed, we may reasonably conclude, that the course of moral actions leads to one great and comprehensive end, not only the good of individuals, but the good of the whole; “for we know that all things work together for good to them that

love God, to them who are *the called* according to his purpose¹."

But as this world is a world of trial, and no man is permitted to enter into the sanctuary, who falls short in the way of his salvation, it becomes him, according to the estimate at which he values his everlasting safety, to give his utmost "diligence to make his calling and election sure²." The preservation of one soul from never-ending and irremediable perdition, is an object of infinite concern, and a link of that chain which leads up to the footstool of the immortal God. The pious and zealous Apostle, therefore, who gives himself wholly to the conversion of a sinner, and the humble penitent, who submits to the strength of argument, and to the still more powerful influence of the Spirit, enlivening and enlightening his understanding, are both employed in the noblest of undertakings; they are doing the work of God in the world; they are completing the plan of an everlasting Providence, and filling the courts of heaven itself with devout and holy worshippers.

The great motive of all human actions is the glory and love of God, a gracious principle implanted by God himself, which inclines us to delight in all that He commands, to esteem all that He esteems, to interest ourselves in every thing that belongs to Him, and to possess no happiness separate from Him, or inconsistent with his sacred and inviolable will. "Worthy art Thou, O Lord, to receive

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

² 2 Pet. i. 10.

glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created¹!”

If we look then for a principle on which the primitive Apostles acted, and on which holy men in every age have acted, we find it here. Christ himself, the great High Priest, professes the same implicit and sanctifying obedience, on removing the sacrifices of the law. “Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all².”

This train of thoughts naturally arises in our minds when we behold the great difficulties and dangers which the first disciples of our Lord encountered, and which were so particularly manifested in the travels and sufferings of St. Paul. No part of his conduct betrayed his mission. Firm, strenuous, intrepid, he met affliction as a friend. “None of these things move me,” said he, in the very spirit of Christian fortitude. Neither in his temper, nor his manner, did the character of an Apostle suffer in his hands. “If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all³.” Though the mind of a good man cannot but be troubled at the tribulation which he suffers even in a righteous cause, yet is his dejection far removed from despair. Nay, in the bottom of his soul there lurks a secret joy, which

¹ Rev. iv. 11.

² Heb. x. 9, 10.

³ Phil. ii. 17.

being founded on a true principle, animates and sustains him in every conflict ; “ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich ; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things¹.”

The affairs of the Church² of Ephesus being in a prosperous situation, as we observed at the conclusion of the last lecture, St. Paul began to arrange plans for his future travels through Macedonia and Achaia, intending from thence to go to Jerusalem, and afterwards to Rome. In the mean time, he employs two faithful ministers of the Gospel, Timothy and Erastus, and sends them into Macedonia in his stead. It has been conjectured, that St. Paul had heard of the death of Claudius Cæsar, and the revocation, or at least suspension, of his decree against the Christians. A Christian society appears also to have been established at Rome, to which the Apostle not long after addressed an epistle. We do not wonder that the indefatigable mind of the Apostle should prompt him to visit the then metropolis of the world. But the time for this journey was not yet arrived. His plans were altered, for reasons which we shall afterwards have occasion to remark.

Though “ a great and effectual door (as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians) had been opened to him at Ephesus, yet, he adds, there are many adversaries³.” The very best days of the Church must expect such interruptions. The very best of men must look for opposition. No one will wonder

¹ 2 Cor. vi 10.

² A. D. 59.

³ 1 Cor. xvi. 9.

at this, who knows the power of the grand adversary of the world, or the reasons why he is permitted to “go up and down seeking whom he may devour¹.” A violent tumult arose in the city, in consequence of the complaint of Demetrius, a maker of silver shrines, little models of the temple of Diana at that place, that his employment was likely to be destroyed by the great increase of Christian worshippers. The celebrity of this great goddess, and the temple erected in honour of her at Ephesus, (considered, from its architecture and magnificence, as one of the seven wonders of the world) are well known in history. These circumstances are artfully dwelt upon by Demetrius, to induce his fellow-citizens to espouse his cause. Interest, interest, in all ages, is that which taketh the greatest hold of the human heart ; yea, *many strong men have been slain by it*. “Sirs ! ye know that by this craft we have our wealth ; besides, look at your celebrated goddess and her temple—both will be despised, if ye check not these Christians in time—their doctrines are spreading rapidly throughout all Asia. Who will worship, or visit the great goddess Diana, if these things are suffered to go on ?” How often have we seen this deception practised ! How often has religion, venerable, divine religion, been made a pretext for all kinds of enormities ! How often has ambition, how often has hypocrisy, fought under this banner ! When, oh ! when will that hour arrive, that this

¹ 1 Pet. v. 8.

child of Heaven shall be revered for *her own sake* ! We must wait, in the confidence of faith, for the completion of all God's promises. We are referred by the Evangelist St. John to such a moment of supreme felicity, when he said, " I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold ! I make all things *new*¹."

The populace of the city were roused by the argument of Demetrius, so powerfully addressed to their prejudices and feelings. The clamour increased. The honour of the goddess must be supported. " Great is Diana of the Ephesians !" They seize two of St. Paul's associates, and hurry them into the theatre, the place of public concourse, that they might publicly examine their pretensions, and punish, or acquit them, as might be expedient. Paul, whose high mind never shrunk from danger, was with difficulty prevented by certain of the chief of Asia (Asiarchs, as they were called, who were delegated to superintend the public games), who were his friends, from offering himself to attend Gaius and Aristarchus in so perilous a situation. The confusion was great in the assembly. Like other popular tumults, the majority could give no account " wherefore they were come together." But the artful leaders knew, and wished to make

¹ Rev. xxi. 3, 5.

their own use of the distracted state of the popular mind. Some were now inclined to hear an apology for the conduct of the Christians from Alexander, supposed to be the coppersmith¹, afterwards mentioned by St. Paul. His profession, of a nature somewhat similar to that of Demetrius, might be the reason why he was thus brought forward, and even supported by the Jewish party. But when the people knew that he was a Jew, the clamour was renewed with greater vehemence, and they refused to hear him. All argument was at an end. The watch-word of a party was only heard. About the space of two hours they vociferated, "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*" At length a conciliating, and temperate speech of the town-clerk, or recorder, appeased the outrage of the multitude. He did not oppose, with indiscreet violence, the prevailing sentiment, but prudently magnified the goddess, who was the object of their frenzy. "Who knows not the heavenly origin of your goddess? Do nothing rashly. These Christians, whatever their belief may be, are neither robbers of churches, as Demetrius would suggest, nor blasphemers of the favourite object of your devotion. Let the matter therefore be brought to a fair hearing. Let both parties produce their pleaders, and abide the consequences of a legal decision. Popular tumults are always unlawful; and we are liable to be called to an account for the present irregular, and disorderly assembly."

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 14.

To this tumult, it has been imagined that the Apostle alludes, when he says, “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus¹.” And again, “We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us *in Asia*, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life².” No account of St Paul’s having been actually delivered to wild beasts in the theatre at Ephesus, where such savage exhibitions were at that time common, is now to be met with. But it does not follow that such might not have been the case. He describes himself as having been “in deaths *oft*.” Alas! what heart does not feel warm towards the great Apostle of the Gentiles, that strenuous defender of the Christian cause! His character rises in our estimation as we proceed in his company. Before him, the philosophers of Athens, the polished Corinthians, the magnificent Ephesians, sink in the comparison. His sublime fortitude, and simple manners, overcame them all. And no wonder; for when he informs us, that he had, on the occasion probably of this very tumult, *the sentence of death in himself*, he adds, as the invigorating spirit of our fortitude and resolution, that “we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, *who raiseth the dead*³.” See here the triumph of the Christian faith! “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

¹ 1 Cor. xv.² 2 Cor. i. 8.³ 2 Cor. i. 9.

always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh¹.” And shall we, whose sorrows are generally the effects of our own follies, and too frequently of our own crimes, shall we give way to an intemperate lamentation when we are checked by some timely affliction? Let it come from what quarter it will, it brings an instructive lesson on its wings. Better men than we are, or perhaps can ever expect to be, have suffered more than perhaps we may be called to suffer. Not that their sufferings can mitigate our own. But when we behold the sources from whence they derived consolation, when we are conscious at how great a distance we stand from their spiritual attainments, we should endeavour to profit by a pure imitation of that good man, and great Apostle, who said “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ².”

Before we take our leave of Ephesus, a city in which St. Paul had spent much valuable time, and which he never visited afterwards, let us reflect on the history of that Church, which commenced under such happy auspices. A traveller informs us, that the image of the Ephesian Diana is represented as crowned with towers, and in each hand holding a staff, or candlestick. With respect to the latter, he adds, it seems somewhat remarkable that God should threaten this city alone, that he would remove *her* candlestick out of its place³. This cir-

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 8—11.

² 1 Cor. xi. 1.

³ Letters from a Painter abroad [suppose, Romney].

cumstance is a proof of the exact coincidence of the voice of prophecy, and that no expression is admitted in Holy Scripture without an appropriate and emphatic meaning. The Church of Ephesus, which, at this period, it appears, received Timothy for its Bishop from the hands of St. Paul, by a particular designation of the Spirit, was eminent during a considerable time for many Christian graces. The Evangelist St. John superintended the Churches of Asia from this metropolis of the country, and in his book of Revelation directs seven epistles of admonition to them. There is a remarkable distinction in the offences for which each Church is severally admonished. We know well that different times and situations produce very different temptations. We may also know, that if we fall into that “sin which doth so easily beset us,” punishment will be equally inflicted upon us as if we had committed any other. This is the true meaning of the Apostle’s observation, that “he who offends in one point is guilty of all ¹.” Whatever variety, therefore, there might be in the faults of the Asiatic Churches, there was one general warning addressed to them all; and through them, my brethren, to the members of every other established Church, in every age, and in every nation. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto *the Churches* ².” Is there any Church, like that of Ephesus, deserving of commendation for its *works*, its *labour*, and its *patience* ? for re-

¹ James ii. 10.

² Rev. ii. 29.

sisting evil, and supporting the truth? Let that Church beware, lest it bear within its bosom other principles which may work its destruction. “Notwithstanding that thou hast in some things done well, I have, said the Spirit, *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love;” thou hast forsaken the sound precepts of thy first teachers, thy primitive piety and purity; thou hast suffered thyself to relax in that warm affection of faith, which distinguished thy first entrance into the communion of saints. “Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy *first works*; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.” The sentence which has been executed upon one Church, may fall upon another for similar offences. Thence it is, that we are so emphatically recommended to *hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches*. The Church of Ephesus, and other Christian Churches of Asia, exist no more. The great city of Ephesus, once called one of the eyes of Asia, is venerable for nothing but ruins of palaces, temples, and amphitheatres; one Church only remains, which is now converted into a Turkish mosque. The magnificent structure dedicated to Diana, which we have so lately seen the cause of a popular tumult, and a persecution of the Christians, now lies level with the ground. The whole town, indeed, is nothing but an habitation for herdsmen and farmers, living in low and humble cottages; sheltered from the extremities of weather by mighty masses of ruinous walls, the

pride and ostentation of former days, and the emblem, in these, of the frailty of the world, and the transient vanity of human glory ¹.

“Such is the state and condition of this once glorious and flourishing Church, as well as of the other Asiatic Churches; and there cannot be a stronger proof of the truth of prophecy, nor a more effectual warning to other Christians. These objects, as a spectator of them justly observes ², ought to make us, who yet enjoy the divine mercies, to tremble, and earnestly contend to find out *from whence we are fallen*, and do daily fall, from bad to worse; that God is a God of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*; and seeing the *axe* is thus long since *put to the root of the tree*, should it not make us repent, and turn to God, *lest we likewise perish*? We see here *what destruction the Lord hath brought upon the earth*. But *it is the Lord's doing*; and thence we may reap no small advantage, by considering how *just* he is in all his *judgments*, and faithful in all his promises ³.”

It was not long after the tumult which had arisen in the affair of Demetrius, that St. Paul prepared to pursue his Apostolic journey. He was not, however, on this occasion, so suddenly driven from the

¹ The deplorable state of the Apocalyptic Churches has been elucidated by modern travellers. See a letter from the Rev. H. Lindsay, Chaplain to the Embassy at Constantinople, relative to their present state, 1816;—and also Arundell's “Visit to the Seven Churches of Asia.” 8vo. 1828.

² Sir George Wheeler.

³ Bishop Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies, Rev. ii. iii.

city, as to prevent his deliberately arranging the concerns of the Church. “ He *called unto him* the disciples ;” a circumstance which denotes his superiority ; “ and embraced them.” He takes an affectionate leave of them ; as it was more than probable that he should see them again no more. This solemn departure of the Apostle, as we shall soon see exemplified on another occasion, where his whole discourse is recorded, was intended to impress upon their minds the important nature of his admonitions. Thus the dying parent employs the awful moment of his departure from this mortal scene, to fix solemn and impressive lessons in the bosom of his darling children. His whole anxious life perhaps had been dedicated to that purpose ; but such a moment is too precious to be lost. The good principles, long inculcated, may, by the grace of God, be now fixed for ever. It is a moment ever to be remembered ; and, most likely, ever to be remembered with pure piety, and solemn sanctity of thought.

The Church of Ephesus continued under the care of Timothy when St. Paul set forward on his journey into Macedonia¹. “ I besought thee,” said

¹ During this journey through Macedonia, St. Paul is thought to have written his second Epistle to the Corinthians. In the first Epistle, he announces his intention of passing through Macedonia in his way to Corinth. In the second Epistle, we find him arrived in Macedonia, and about to pursue his journey to Corinth. 2 Cor. ix. 2. Some commentators have attributed the date of St. Paul’s first Epistle to Timothy, to this period. Dr. Paley places it subsequent to his first imprisonment at Rome,

he, in an Epistle shortly after written to him, “to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia¹.” It appears from this Epistle, that he was much distressed by the conduct and behaviour of the Judaizing Christians that he had left at Ephesus; for he adds, “that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine;” and briefly alludes to the nature of their pretended instructions, their “*fables and endless genealogies*, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.” No condition of the human mind is more deplorable for a man’s self, or more dangerous when it endeavours to interest others, than ignorance without humility. I need not observe, that a greater affliction can hardly befall any Church than the introduction of persons teaching *strange doctrines*. How many uneasy moments must it have cost St. Paul, when he found that he had scarce departed from Ephesus, before grievous wolves appeared, who did not spare the flock! Let us beware of encouraging any doctrine but that which leadeth to everlasting life. Worldly men have worldly ends to answer; but there is only one sure, unerring, and justifying *faith*. It is pure as purity itself, strong as the everlasting mountains. The word of truth records it; the heart of the true believer is sensible of its presence. What shall we say then, when

consequently subsequent to the æra, up to which the writer of the Acts of the Apostles brings his history. See *Horæ Paulinæ*, p. 326.

¹ 1 Tim. i 3, &c.

men rise up among us to adulterate this fountain of living waters ; who cast a mist before the fair prospect of the Christian faith ; who “ *minister questions, captious, artful questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith* ¹ ?” What shall we say to the philosophizing deists of the present day, or to those who lower the doctrines of the blessed Gospel itself, to the standard of their own inclinations ? We can only say, God convert them ! and repeat the Apostle’s admonition to his favourite Timothy, as addressed to every faithful servant of Christ, “ But thou, O man of God, flee these things ; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness ; fight the good fight of faith ; lay hold on eternal life ; I give thee charge in the sight of God who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ².”

The account of St. Paul’s travels after he left Ephesus, is very much abridged. It is probable that he went first to Troas ; then passed by his former course into Macedonia ; and from thence into Greece, *where he abode three months*. This residence was doubtless at Corinth ³ ; and the time

¹ 1 Tim. i. 4. ² 1 Tim. vi. 11, &c.

³ From hence, it appears clearly, St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans. “ *Now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints, for it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.*” Rom. xv. 25, 26. Compare—“ When he had gone over those parts (viz. Macedonia), and had given them much exhorta-

of his abode there being noticed, denotes that he did not remain so long in any other place during his journey thither. His affectionate intercourse with his former friends, and new converts, is very briefly mentioned in the history :—" he gave them much exhortation." How many eloquent harangues, how many kind remonstrances and pious admonitions are comprehended in this short expression ! From the specimens which we possess, our wishes are excited for larger communications. But let us remember, that those, which the Divine Spirit has been pleased to leave upon record, are fully sufficient for our salvation ; and if we hear not the voice which hath already spoken, neither should we be persuaded with more ample, or even, *if that were possible*, more eloquent declarations of the Almighty will.

It appears, from several passages in the Epistles to the Corinthians, that one great object of the Apostle's attention during this journey, was to promote a pecuniary subscription for the poor members of the Christian Church at Jerusalem. We have here a model of charity, which has often been happily adopted, to relieve those wants, which the most abundant riches of individuals were not able to supply. It affords also a considerable advantage to the charitable Christian, whose means are not

tion, he came into Greece, and there abode three months ; and when the Jews laid wait for him, *as he was about to sail into Syria*, he purposed to return through Macedonia." Acts xx. 2, 3.

equal to his inclination, and who ought on no account to be deprived of the opportunity of exercising an indispensable duty. The public, too, is benefited, in a greater degree, by this union of charitable hearts. And whilst the rich man's contribution loses nothing of its weight, an intrinsic value is stamped upon the smallest expression of the poor man's benevolence.

This object of the Apostle's journey accounts, in a satisfactory manner, for the rapidity of his movements, as well as for a sudden alteration of the course of his travels. His intention had been to have passed immediately by sea from Corinth to Syria; but understanding that a plot was laid for his destruction by some evil minded Jews, probably on account of the treasure which he was supposed to carry with him, he returned through Macedonia. At Philippi, where he landed on a former voyage, he now took shipping, and after five days came again to Troas. In this journey, Sopater of Berea was his only companion; if we except Luke, who once more joined the Apostle, and accompanied him to Troas.

At this place they met several of their friends, who had probably been engaged, in various places, in the same charitable cause, and who now waited for their arrival; Aristarchus and Secundus, Gaius and Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus, whose characters are to be met with in the Epistles of their faithful friend. Can we have a stronger proof of the effects of faith, than when we see so large

an assembly of good men united in the cause of charity? It is pleasing too to observe the readiness with which those, who perhaps had *nothing over*, contributed to so pious a purpose. The Apostle bears witness to the pure benevolence of the Churches of Macedonia, who, “to their power, yea, and beyond their power, were willing of themselves, praying us, *with much intreaty*, that we would receive the gift; and this they did, not as we hoped, but first *gave their own selves* to the Lord, and to us by the will of God¹.” This, this is indeed true charity. Liberality, munificence, generosity, are all high sounding words, but if a man *give not himself first unto the Lord*, his gifts, his alms, and his donations, return into his bosom without a blessing.

I mean not to disparage this heaven-born principle of charity. *God is love*. Christ is love. The very soul of religion is love. But men are apt to adopt only one branch of charity, and thus deceive themselves in the performance of an important duty. The favourite principle of the present day is benevolence. This, it is expected, will do much for us. And so undoubtedly it will, when it becomes an outward expression, that our whole body and soul, and spirit, are devoted to God in the purest sense of religious adoration. But if our charitable contributions, whether public or private, are intended to recommend ourselves, and claim any merit whatever on their own account, if they

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 3, &c.

have any worldly end in view, or lead us to imagine that we are very good, because we are very charitable, the professors of such affected philanthropy must be told, that they have yet to learn the first elements of a Christian life. The only way to judge of the dispositions of our minds, is to try our conduct by the Apostle's rule—Have we *first given ourselves to the Lord*? If we have not, or if we are not disposed to make this necessary and indispensable offering of our hearts, we must be assured that all other gifts are vain. This alone is a genuine proof of our Christianity. We may perform many good works from a variety of motives *apparently* good, sometimes perhaps arising from prudence of mind, sometimes from constitution of body; but if they spring from any other motive than a religious dedication of ourselves to God, through Him who presented himself as *a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice* for us, they will not, they cannot be an acceptable memorial before the throne of grace. This is a truth which should impress itself strongly on the minds of those who are in the habit of evincing such marks of a benevolent heart, without any regard to the religious motive. Neither such *habits*, nor such *marks* are charity, I repeat again, if they proceed not from a true principle, a principle which informs us that all we are, and all we have, are at the disposal of an all-wise, all-good, and supreme Director of all earthly things. “Therefore let no man glory in men; for all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas (good men, as well as good

things, are only instruments) or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—all are yours—and ye are Christ's: and Christ is God's ¹."

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23.

LECTURE XXI.

ACTS XX. 7. XXI. 1—15.

St. Paul's third Apostolic Journey concluded.—Troas—Assos—Mitylene—Chios—Samos—Trogylgium—Miletus—Coos—Rhodes—Patera—Tyre—Ptolemais—Cæsarea—Jerusalem—A.D. 60.

“ To have seen St. Paul in the pulpit was one of those three things which St. Augustine thought worth the wishing for. And surely, adds a venerable Prelate, it were very desirable to have seen this glorious instrument of God, who did such wonders in the world, to have heard his plain and powerful eloquence, which was so mighty through God, for the casting down of strong holds, and the subduing of men to the obedience of the Gospel ; to have beheld the zeal of this holy man, who was all on fire for God, with what ardency of affection and earnestness of expression he persuaded men to come into Christ, and entertain the Gospel. But as we cannot hope for this, he says, it should be some satisfaction to our curiosity (and certainly still more conducive to our edification) to know *what*

St. Paul preached, what was the chief subject of his sermons, whither he referred all his discourses, and to what they tended¹.”

Of this we cannot remain in ignorance, from the very ample communications in this book of Acts ; and the observation will be further illustrated in this Lecture, where we shall find the Apostle more than once in the assemblies of his friends, discoursing freely on the heavenly doctrines of his Master, uninterrupted by captious inquirers, unassailed by persecution. In this portion of his travels, tenderness assumes the reign. He had reason to believe that a personal intercourse with many of his old friends would cease ; that, if his life should even be preserved much longer, which he hardly expected, the scene of his future labours must be in some other place. This consideration gives a great interest to the several incidents which conclude this journey, and prepares the mind of the serious observer for similar changes, which may, nay, *must* occur to every man, as he travels along the road of life.

The Apostle had reached Troas by sea, on his return from Macedonia and Greece ; and there he remained seven days, that he might meet his Brethren on the Sabbath-day. The manners of the primitive Christians are here incidentally described. St. Paul does not call the Church together, as he had done on other occasions, but waits for the arrival of that sacred day, when the Disciples of the

¹ Tillotson's Works, S. 159.

Gospel should *come together* for their usual purposes of devotion. This day, we find, from this passage, was the *first day of the week*, the day following the Jewish Sabbath ; that day on which our Saviour rose from the dead ; and therefore from that time adopted by the Apostles, and sanctioned by the Holy Spirit, for the celebration of the Christian Sabbath. The causes for this change of the Sabbath afford matter of high exultation to every believer in Christ. The resurrection of our Lord, which we this day celebrate, was that mighty fact on which the Apostles rested the truth of their doctrines. “ If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins¹.” If this circumstance had not been true, the whole structure of Christianity must have fallen to the ground. No day could therefore be more proper for a contemplation of all the blessed promises of the Gospel, as no day could bring greater Salvation on its wings.

If the *Son of Man* then be *Lord of the Sabbath-day*², he has a full and decided right to appropriate that portion of our time to his own purposes ; and every profanation of it is an act of wilful disobedience against so positive a command. Call it not an unnecessary seclusion of ourselves, to dedicate some part of this day to private reading and reflection, as well as to the indispensable duties of public worship : call it not morose or puritanical to withdraw from the company of those who would apply the Lord’s day to mere amusement, or dissi-

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 17.

² Mark ii. 28.

pation, or whose ill-timed mirth would interrupt our instructive lessons, or religious conversations, with our families. Mistake me not ; I am far from wishing to mix gloom and melancholy with the truly cheerful and benevolent religion of Christ. Light and darkness are not more at variance. But the Sabbath is the Lord's day, and he is guilty of the worst of *thefts*, who would deprive Him of it.

That we may the better understand how St. Paul spent this holy day with the Church at Troas, let us attend to the description which one of the early Fathers of the Christian Church gives us of the manner in which the public service was conducted within, nearly, the first age of Christianity. "On Sunday," says Justin Martyr, "all the Christians in the city and country meet together, because that is the day of our Lord's resurrection ; and then we have read unto us the writings of the Prophets and Apostles ; this done, the President makes an oration unto the assembly, to exhort them to imitate and do the things they heard ; then we all join in prayer, and after, we celebrate the Sacrament, and they that are able and willing, give alms¹." If it were not known that this was an account of the performance of divine worship within forty years of the death of St. John the Evangelist, it might be imagined to describe that of the Church of England, according to its present happy constitution. Let us be careful of this sacred deposit, my Brethren ! and transmit it, by the blessing of

¹ Apol. c. 87.

God, who has protected it, through difficulties and dangers, though *evil report* and *good report*, safely and unsullied, to our posterity, as an invaluable mean and pledge of our salvation.

In an upper chamber, generally a large and commodious room in the Oriental houses, the Christian congregation was assembled; not in a clandestine manner, but openly, as there were lights in the apartment where they met. For here the Apostle preached; and as he was to leave them the next day, he continued his discourse until midnight. A young man, of the name of Eutychus, oppressed with sleep, fell from the third story into the area of the house, and was taken up dead. The infirmity of Eutychus, perhaps, rather demands pity, than reprehension. The *real* failings of human nature will always be regarded with an eye of compassion. But no man should deceive himself, or suffer himself to be deceived, by words of softness. His sins are no less *sins*, because he chooses to call them *infirmities*. He whose duty cannot keep him awake when sounds of evangelical harmony are presented to his ears, who feels dull and languid when the heavenly discourses of his Redeemer are recited before him, or drowsy when the lightning of St. Paul's eloquence flashes before his eyes, falls, as it were, from an height which thousands would be glad to attain, and runs a fatal hazard of being taken up dead. The sleep of the soul, in this sense, is more dangerous than the most unhappy lethargy of the body. In general we sleep that we may wake refreshed, and ready for our duty; but,

in this case, we sleep, never to wake again ; never to wake to any purpose of happiness, or refreshment.

When the Apostle knew the circumstance of the fall and death of Eutychus, like another Elijah, he “ went down, and fell on him, and embracing him, said, Trouble not yourselves ; for his life is in him.” And, to the great consolation of his friends, they soon returned together into the assembly.

“ Trouble not yourselves ; for *his life is in him.*” —The affectionate interposition of the Apostle, and this consolatory expression, recall to our memory the exertions of a Society justly entitled HUMANE, which, in places of greater concourse, have been attended with the happiest consequences. The mysterious union between the vital spirit and corporeal frame, is ready to be dissolved. The subtle, *silver cord of life*, gives way. Animation is suspended. Death draws his sable curtain over the blooming features of youth, or the furrowed brow of age ; and all the rest is apprehension and despair. What can avert the most exquisite of human feelings ? The blessing of God upon rational and well-digested means. The restoration both of animal and spiritual life, depends upon the use of means. You can no more resuscitate the expiring ember of life without the judicious application of medical aid, assisted by Him alone who first breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, than you can restore the dying sinner, without the means of grace, to all the blessings of a life of righteousness.

Having *broken bread*, administered the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, to the great comfort of the Brethren at Troas ; and having continued his instructive converse with them till the morning dawned, the holy Apostle took his leave and departed. St. Paul's companions went by sea, but he himself took a shorter road, and crossed the Isthmus by land, and met them at Assos, another sea-port of that country. At this place they re-embarked, and soon arrived at Mitylene, a principal city of the island of Lesbos : the next day they lay off Chios ; the day following they came to Samos, (both islands in the Grecian Archipelago) and after touching upon Trogyllium, a promontory of Ionia, they arrived the next day at Miletus, another city on the continent of Asia.

As St. Paul could not at this time visit Ephesus, which he had now passed by in his voyage, being desirous of reaching Jerusalem before the ensuing Pentecost (which was near) he used the authority of an Apostle, and sent for the Elders of the Church from thence to meet him at Miletus, which was about twenty-eight miles distant¹. Who these Elders were, cannot accurately be known ; whether they were the Bishops of Asia Minor in general, or only the chief of the Church of Ephesus, of which Timothy (at this time travelling with St. Paul) was Bishop. Some have conjectured, that the twelve who had received only John's Baptism,

¹ Biscoe, p. 372.

and were afterwards baptized and endowed with miraculous gifts at the Apostle's last visit to Ephesus, were designed to superintend the scattered Churches of that province, and formed a part of the present assembly. This may have been the case; but our attention is only directed to what the history, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has recorded. That there were those of this high order among them, there can be no doubt from the expression, "Take heed to yourselves, and to the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," literally, *Bishops*¹. It does not indeed appear that there was time to assemble all the Bishops of Asia, or even the greater part of them; but as Ephesus was the metropolis of the Church, as well as of the province, it is probable that a considerable number might be able to attend the summons.

It is necessary to remark on this passage, in the words of the learned Hooker, that "the name of Bishop hath been borrowed from the Grecians, and signifies one who hath principal charge to guide and oversee others. The same word in Ecclesiastical Writings being applied unto Church governors, at the first *unto all*, and not unto the chiefest only, grew in short time peculiar and proper to signify such episcopal authority alone, as the chiefest governors exercised over the rest; for with all names this is usual, that inasmuch as they are not given, till the things whereunto they are given have

¹ Επισκόπους.

been sometime first observed ; therefore, generally, things are ancients than the names whereby they are called ¹." Thus an Elder might be a Bishop, as every Bishop now is a priest, or presbyter ; but as in the earliest history of the Church, we find persons exercising a predominant jurisdiction over others ; so the same order has continued, without any interruption, in the greater part of Christian Churches to the present day.

The address of St. Paul to the Ephesian Bishops demands a very particular attention, even when compared with his other discourses. It is at once eloquent, pious, and pathetic. It interests by its personal allusions ; it warms the heart by the zeal and earnestness of its applications. Rapt up even above himself, his whole soul seems absorbed in his subject. Agitated by the tenderest emotions, he draws tears of affection from his sorrowing friends. He repays them with his own. Can there be, on both sides, stronger proofs of genuine sincerity ? Can the heart of man doubt the soundness, or reality of their principles ? Let the philosopher reason coolly of such situations ; but let the Christian, while he approves the argument, be no stranger to the delicacy of the feeling.

The Apostle begins his discourse with a short reference to his former conduct and behaviour while he resided with them at Ephesus, and particularly notices his escape from the snares and persecutions of the Jews. He reminds them that he *served the Lord with all humility of mind*, not out

¹ Eccl. Pol. B. 7.

of an ostentatious display of this amiable Christian grace, for that would not have been consistent with his character, but as a model for a Christian Pastor. Though in rank he bore an eminent authority in the Church, yet he used it with modesty and moderation. His intercourse was friendly and familiar; not only communicating to all who required his assistance, every thing that was *profitable* for them, but he did so in the most engaging manner;—"He taught them publicly, and from house to house." No man knew better than himself, what was necessary for all his hearers. Some wanted consolation; some wanted reproof: but all wanted instruction. There was one doctrine which belonged to all, and constituted a part of all St. Paul's discourses; he *testified* to all, both *Jews and Greeks*, both bond and free, to men of England, as well as men of Israel, *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*: he *testified*, the expression denotes the extreme earnestness with which he pressed upon *them*—and let it be understood also upon *us*—to repent of all our sins, and to believe in Him, whose merits alone can make repentance available to salvation. We are all sinners; of course we stand as convicted criminals before the bar of Almighty Justice. We repent. But what then? Repentance cannot remove the guilt of sin. But the merits and mercies of our blessed Saviour can. These we can only apply to our souls through faith. This, therefore, was St. Paul's doctrine; it is ours: and will be the only saving knowledge to the end of time.

Having thus recounted the sum and substance of the Gospel which he taught, the Apostle turns his discourse to his future expectations of persecution for the Gospel's sake, and the place where he supposed his severe trials would begin ; and, like those of his Master, would perhaps be brought to a conclusion. " Behold I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem," willing to submit to whatever shall befall me there ; neither am I ignorant that these sufferings await me ; for wherever I travel the Holy Ghost hath revealed them to my friends ; but he adds, with a fortitude which no other cause could inspire, " None of these things move me"—I have higher ends in view—" I count not my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

—Hear this noble declaration, ye whose lukewarm minds keep no pace with the Apostle's feelings ! It is not to you that the lame, the blind, the spiritual leper, or the poor in spirit, look for consolation. It is not to you that they apply for spiritual relief. For as you never felt the necessity of a saving faith, you cannot communicate its benefits to others. The generous disposition of St. Paul led him to despise all selfish motives—*I seek not mine own profit—I count not my life dear*. He saw nothing, he felt nothing, but the glory of God, and the prosperity of the Church of Christ. He had no interest but his Master's ; his love, his desire, his joy, and his crown, were all devoted to his Master's service.

The Apostle then opens the reasons for which he had given his friends the trouble of a journey to Miletus. “And now, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching *the kingdom of God* (*that* repentance and *that* faith before explained) shall see my face no more.” This circumstance must always be attended with a tender sorrow. But when we part for *the last time* with a parent, a friend, a father in the Gospel, I will not suppose what may then be our affliction. However we may regret lost opportunities of instruction, however we may accuse ourselves of negligence or inattention, or sometimes, I fear, of ill returns for the kindness of our best friends, all will now be over. We may regret, but we cannot now recover. Happily for them, perhaps they stand upon the firm foundation of the Apostle : “I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men”—I am wilfully the cause of no man’s destruction ; for “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”—I pray God that this exculpation may rest upon myself, and all ministers of the Gospel. Our charge is indeed great ; and, if we neglect it, our sentence will be heavy. Nor let our congregations imagine themselves uninterested in the observation ; for if they refuse to hear, or do not profit by what the Church of God is always ready to communicate, alas ! we shall both fall into condemnation.

All the counsel of God—the expression is emphatic and important. We must not mutilate, much less misrepresent, the holy doctrines which we are

commissioned to deliver. “Yea, woe is unto us, if we preach not *the Gospel* ¹,” *whole Gospel*, as it has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit of God. For if we preach only a part of the divine Revelation, how shall we be said to preach *the Gospel*? If we become philosophers in the pulpit, and retail the moral precepts of Cicero and Epictetus only, whatever commendation we may receive for our eloquent morality, how shall we be said to preach *the Gospel*? Nay, if we separate the sum and substance of Christianity itself, and think to be saved by an historic faith, or any other description of faith, but that which rests solely in Christ, and is productive of good works, how shall we be said to preach *the Gospel*? When we have thus fairly and honestly “*divided the word of truth* ²,” then, and not till then, may we lay our hands upon our hearts and announce with St. Paul, that we are *pure from the blood of all men*, and that we have truly, piously, and conscientiously declared unto our hearers the *whole counsel of God*.

. How awful is the charge which immediately follows, comprehensive of the entire duty of a Christian Minister! A charge which, if any Minister can hear unmoved, it may reasonably be concluded, that he is unworthy the high office which he holds. For though it be addressed to the rulers of Churches which were then present, its obligation extends itself to *all those who have been ordained to any holy function*. If any object to this

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 16.

² 2 Tim. ii. 15.

unlimited interpretation, I refer him at once to his *ordination vows*.—"Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers;" *all the flock*, not making distinctions between rich and poor, not overlooking some, and flattering others, but diligently attending to the wants of *all*, and the more diligently to those, whether rich or poor, whose disconsolate and hungry souls cry aloud for spiritual consolation; "feeding the Church of God," the assembly of faithful Christians, which your Lord and Master "*purchased with his own blood*." It is this consideration which stamps a value on the Church—it was purchased by the precious blood of Christ. The passage particularly displays the divinity of Jesus Christ; for the blood of Jesus is emphatically called the blood of God.

The Apostle dwells with great force on this part of his Charge, as he knew, and therefore cautions them against it, that they would be assailed, both from among themselves, and from others, with seducing and erroneous teachers. To impress this the more strongly, he pathetically reminds them of his former diligence and exhortations, accompanied even with tears. "And now, Brethren, I recommend you to God, and to the word of his grace."—What a legacy is this! surpassed only by that of Christ Himself—"Peace I leave with you, *my* peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you¹." He appeals to his own distin-

¹ John xiv. 27.

guished character as a proof of his sincerity. And if we compare this appeal with the last declaration of Samuel, however we may admire his noble challenge, we shall find a still superior principle in the language of the Apostle.—“Behold, here I am : witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed. Whose ox have I *taken*? Whose ass have I *taken*? Whom have I *defrauded*¹?” said the prophet of Israel in all the consciousness of innocence. “No man’s silver, or gold, or apparel have I *coveted* ;” said the Apostle. He not only did not *take*, but he did not *desire*. And then lifting up his honest hands in an expressive attitude, he exclaimed in the most feeling manner : “Yea, you yourselves know, that *these hands* have ministered to my own, and my friends’ necessities.” He proposes, with great propriety, his own example of industry ; and concludes with recommending to them the greatest of all Christian graces, the grace of charity, that particularly confirmed by a well-remembered expression of the Saviour Himself : “It is more blessed,” that is, “It is a blessed thing to give, rather than receive².” It is more becoming the Christian character to communicate to the necessities of others, whether temporal or spiritual, by an exertion of personal abilities, than either from indolence, or from any other cause, to be the objects of our neighbour’s attention and compassion.

The expression of the Apostle reaches still far-

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 3.

² Hammond in locum.

ther: it instructs us that, poverty itself is no apology for a want of charity, even in this sense of the word. The hands that are able to work, should assist, to the utmost of their ability, those that are not. “*So labouring, ye ought to support the weak.*” What is this, but to recommend those most prudent, as well as useful, institutions, FRIENDLY SOCIETIES, amongst the poor? The rich themselves, too, are required not to confine all their liberality to a distribution of the *superfluity* of their good things. David said to Araunah, “I will not serve the Lord *with that which shall cost me nothing* ¹.” True charity will not repine, nay, rather will rejoice, if it be accompanied with some privations.

The effect of the Apostle’s address may be more easily conceived than expressed. Like a good father taking his last leave of his children, the venerable Apostle *kneeled down, and prayed with them all.* “*And they all wept sore;*” and, with further expressions of tenderness and concern, “fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.” Tears thus shed, and thus received, are pious testimonies of affection. The Saviour who dropt a tender tear over the sepulchre of a friend, will accept the offering of a faithful heart.

Not satisfied with their attention, St. Paul’s friends *accompanied him to the ship*; and then took

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

their last look, and last leave, of their beloved father in the Gospel.

“ Having *gotten from them* ” — the expression implies the reluctance which both sides felt at parting, and which St. Luke could well describe as he was one of the company, the Apostle and his friends proceeded in their voyage. By a straight course they came to the island of Coos ; on the following day to that of Rhodes, and from thence to Patara, a sea-port of the province of Lycia, on the continent of Asia. At this place they embarked in a trading vessel, which was ready to sail for Phœnicia ; and after passing within sight of the island of Cyprus, they landed at Tyre, a considerable city of Phœnicia, well known in history, and at that time particularly celebrated for its extensive commerce.

How exactly does the narrative of this voyage agree with probability ! The situation of the places mentioned, are all accurately and geographically distinguished. The incidental observation of the place *where* the ship was to *unlade her burthen*, accords with the history of the times ; and the simple manner in which the passage is described, leaves no doubt upon the mind, that we are perusing an account of real transactions.

At Tyre, where they remained seven days, they met with an established society of Christians. Some of these, endowed with a prophetic spirit, advised the Apostle not to venture himself in Jerusalem, for fear of the serious consequences which, they foresaw, might ensue. But St. Paul's fortitude

resisted their importunity. When he departed; they testified their love for him, by attending him from the city to the ship, with all their families; and they all *kneeled down together on the sea-shore and prayed*. Where the spirit is willing, a convenient situation will always be found for prayer.

The sea-shore is particularly adapted for religious meditation. We frequently find the Jews using it for this purpose; and those whose minds are open to religious complacency, will experience the benefit of occasionally resorting to scenes of natural beauty, or impressive grandeur. Not only those who *go down to the sea in ships*, but those who view *from the shore* the boundless waters of the ocean, now calm and placid, now boisterous and tempestuous, must acknowledge the inconceivable greatness of the supreme Creator, displayed in all the mighty wonders of the deep.

From Tyre they sailed along the coast of Syria to Ptolemais, now better known by the name of *Acre*, a city not less celebrated in modern, than in ancient, times. After a short stay, they came to Cæsarea, another city on the same coast, where St. Paul landed from his former voyage. Here they accepted the hospitality of Philip the Evangelist, and remained for some time at his house. His house was the house of piety. God blesses the family of the righteous. He had four daughters, who possessed the gift of prophecy, not only perhaps foretelling things to come, but expounding, by a particular gift of the Spirit, the Prophetic Scriptures, and furthering, according to their ability, the pro-

gress of the Gospel. Thus God was pleased to distinguish the first preaching of the disciples : and thus, in all ages, we may learn, that the female sex may greatly contribute, by their knowledge of religion, their pious examples, and amiable influence, to diffuse the bright beams of Christianity to an unlimited extent.

While they tarried here, Agabus, whom we have formerly seen at Antioch, arrived from Jerusalem. By a symbolic prophecy, such as the writings of the ancient prophets often present to us, he warned the Apostle, that if he persevered in his journey to Jerusalem, he would be bound with fetters, *as he bound himself with Paul's girdle*. St. Paul's companions now caught the same fear, and joined his other friends in their entreaties. But the Apostle silenced all further interference by this warm and manly expostulation : " What ! mean ye to weep and to break my heart ? " My love for you would induce me to make any personal sacrifices. I am melted, even to tenderness, by your affection. But do not, I pray you, do not weaken my resolution in so critical a moment. My mind, my conscience, my duty, all impel me to resist your kind importunities ; for " I am ready not to be bound only, but to *die* at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." How elevated and estimable is St. Paul's conduct ! Though we may not be called upon to equal his conflicts, still let his bold example animate our breasts. Every man must expect some sufferings. The very *war of his passions* may be the triumph of his faith. We must steel our

hearts in this warfare against all seductions of our friends, all intimidation of our enemies. We must be ready not to be *bound* only, not only to bear lesser evils with Christian fortitude and patience, but to *die* also, to suffer any extremity; even the loss of life itself, for the name, and in the cause, of Christ.

When the Apostle's friends beheld the nobleness and resolution of his mind, they acquiesced; and with that piety which the true Christian only can experience, they said, "The will of the Lord be done!"—The die was now cast. A very few miles of the journey remained. St. Luke, who still continued in the company, finishes his account of it in few words. "And after those days, we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem."

The conclusion of this journey brings me to the conclusion of this section of my Lectures. I feel, and I doubt not, my Brethren, from your obliging attention and unremitted attendance, that you join with me in sentiment, that the narrative of the travels of St. Paul is both interesting, as a part of the history of a good man, and conducive to our everlasting salvation, as the recorded, and divinely attested, proceedings of an eminent Apostle of Christ. From a due consideration of his painful journeys and personal sufferings, his eloquent and persuasive discourses, his pathetic addresses and miracles wrought in attestation of the truth of the Gospel, let us draw a strong argument in confirmation of that faith which he taught. To be able to trace thus calmly, and appreciate truly, so many, and

such important events in the infancy of the Christian Church, can be ascribed only to that supreme and providential care, which, in every age, has guarded, improved, and enlarged the fold of Christ; which has blessed it from time to time with faithful and true pastors; and which, by the promised and constant influence of the divine Spirit of truth, will continue to preserve it for a further increase of glory.

END OF SECTION THE THIRD.

SECTION IV.

LECTURE XXII.

ACTS XXI. 16. XXII. 1—29.

*St. Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem.—Apprehension in the Temple.
—Defence from the Stairs of the Castle. Jerusalem, A.D.
60.*

IF we select from the history of all nations, one particularly distinguished by wonderful and supernatural events, governed, for a long series of years, by the immediate agency of Heaven, and continually the object of kind entreaties, and warm exhortations, from venerable, and divinely inspired prophets, and teachers—that nation is the nation of the Jews. If we select from that nation one city, the scene of these great and astonishing events, eminent above all others for the favour of God, the splendour of public worship, the highest motives of piety ; and yet, in opposition to all warnings, to all

threatenings, throwing down the sacred altar of Jehovah, slaying her prophets with the sword, and finally rejecting the holy messenger of the new covenant—that city is the city of Jerusalem. If we go one step further, and observe the temporal result of this infatuated conduct, if we contemplate the fall of this once celebrated city, her sumptuous temple overturned to its very foundation, her gay palaces levelled with the dust, many thousands¹ of her people destroyed in one siege, the rest dispersed to the four corners of the globe, and their posterity remaining to this day a monument of divine displeasure; surely we must confess, that a succession of more extraordinary occurrences will not be found in the history of mankind.

How pathetically have the ancient prophets lamented over the sins of Jerusalem! “Who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? Or who shall bemoan thee? Or who shall go aside to ask, how thou dost²?” How deep and heartfelt too was the compassion of Jesus for this favoured, but devoted city! When he was rudely accosted by the Pharisees with this stern command, “Get thee out, and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee;” he is not diverted either from the end, or *place*, of his mission; his mind rests upon Jerusalem, where the most revered of the prophets had suffered before him. “It cannot be,” he says “that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.” And reflecting on the magnitude of her approaching punishment, he ex-

¹ 1,100,000. Jos.

² Jer. xv. 5.

claims, in language beautiful and impressive, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” *Behold!* I see it clearly as if the dreadful day were now before my eyes. “*Behold!* your house is left unto you desolate ¹.”

To this city, now within ten years of its destruction, we accompanied the venerable Paul at the conclusion of the last Lecture. It has pleased God, after some changes, to which I will not now refer ², to bring us together again, that we may finish these interesting travels together. Unintimidated by those apprehensions so warmly expressed by his friends on his journey, the Apostle boldly entered Jerusalem; and though another city, and another period, were selected by Providence for the *termination* of his useful labours, this place, and this occasion, may be considered as the commencement of his martyrdom. In the course of nature, death constitutes but a single act. “It is appointed unto men once to die ³ ;” yet, morally speaking, the afflicted suffer many deaths. The appointment of Providence must be fulfilled both in their personal sufferings, and in the effect which their conduct may have upon others. Thus it happened to St. Paul in many periods of his varied life. “I protest by your rejoicing, he says, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, *I die daily* ⁴.”

¹ Luke xiii. 31, &c.

² The Author being removed to another benefice.

³ Heb. ix. 27.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 31.

But whatever he suffered from his enemies, he had great consolation in his friends. In this journey, besides the Evangelist St. Luke, who wrote the history, he was accompanied by several of this description, from Cæsarea; and in particular by Mnason, an old disciple, and a native of Cyprus, who wished to shew kindness to the Apostle by entertaining him hospitably in his house at Jerusalem. *An old disciple*—how venerable is age when sanctified by religion! “The hoary head is indeed a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness¹.” This good old man might have become a convert when Paul and Barnabas visited the island where he was born; but I am rather inclined to believe that he was one of our Lord’s first followers and *disciples*, both from his time of life, and appellation. Under this impression we look upon him with the greater reverence, as continuing *faithful unto death*, and sympathizing with the Apostle, both in age and in religion; for St. Paul was now rising into years, as he not long afterwards adduces this as a motive (and surely a tender motive it is) for an increased attention. “Where, though I might be much bold in Christ, to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet *for love’s sake* I rather beseech thee, being such a one as Paul *the aged*, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ².”

St. Paul and his friends could not but be well received in Jerusalem by those whose feelings were in unison with their own. We are told that “the

¹ Prov. xvi. 31.

² Phil. viii. 9.

brethren received them *gladly* ;” the poor, because they brought with them a plentiful supply from the charitable contributions of different and distant Christian Churches, the opulent, as they communicated treasures infinitely more valuable than transient and perishing riches ; *all*, as rejoicing in the prosperity of that Gospel, which brings to every man the happy tidings of grace and salvation.

The day after their arrival, a solemn reception was given to the Apostle, and his company. James presided at this assembly, as at a former, assisted by the elders, the presbyters of the Church. At this meeting, St. Paul made a full display of his ministerial conduct among the idolatrous Gentiles, to whom, in his last journey, he had, in a great measure, dedicated his labours. The assembly could not but approve of his success ; but the converts of Jerusalem were not yet ready to join cordially in the reception of the Gentiles into the Christian Church. So difficult is it to master our prejudices, and allow to others, where there is no real danger in the permission, equal privileges with ourselves. The congregation of converted Jews were now numerous in Jerusalem. “ Thou seest, brother, how many thousands (*myriads*, that is, ten thousands, according to the original) there are which believe.” Happy increase of this heavenly plant ! Not that we are to imagine so many were at that time in Jerusalem, but a definite, is put for an indefinite, number, and we are enabled to mark the progress of Christian faith since the day of the ascension, when the

disciples met together in an *upper room*. The Jewish converts were zealous observers of such rites and ceremonies of their Master, as they thought compatible with their profession of Christianity. To give offence to these, by the immediate suppression of *every* Jewish custom, was not judged expedient by the present meeting. They therefore recommend to the Apostle, as rumours of his conduct with respect to the idolatrous Gentiles had probably transpired in Jerusalem, to join himself to four persons performing the legal ceremonies consequent on the Nazarite's vow which they had taken, that it might appear that the prejudices against him were not true; but that, though a friend to Christianity, he was no inveterate enemy to their personal customs, and such ceremonies even of the Mosaic law, as were not inconsistent with his principles; at the same time they refer to the former decree of the Church at Jerusalem, which left the Gentile converts at liberty as to Jewish customs, except those which were enjoined by the Proselytes of the Gate. So reasonable did the Apostle esteem this good advice, that he made no hesitation in complying with it.

We, who, in the course of this narrative, have seen the warm and manly conduct of St. Paul, that "he would give place by subjection, no not for an hour, to those false brethren who came in privily to spy out the liberty which he had in Christ Jesus, to bring him into bondage¹," shall have no difficulty

¹ Gal. ii. 4, 5.

in acquitting him of all servile accommodation upon this occasion. Inconsistent as human nature is, this great Apostle is no example of it. If any one should say, that there is an unbending and unvarying *rule of right*, from which it is unlawful to depart, we shall readily subscribe to the observation. But if no allowance is to be made for that *judgment*, which is to adapt the rule of right to the various circumstances of common life, we shall often find ourselves in the situation which has given rise to that celebrated aphorism, “*summum jus, summa injuria*,” *extreme right* has a tendency to become *extreme wrong*. This principle is acknowledged in the constitution even of our own country, where there are courts of equity, as well as courts of common law. I do not know that these high courts of judicature are in opposition to one another ; but their very existence together, is a proof that, the investigation of some causes requires a delicacy, which would be totally obstructed by a harsh, unbending administration of justice.

By this argument I am far from wishing to inculcate the dangerous doctrine of expediency, which may be carried to an excess inconsistent with moral conduct. But I consider human actions as we find them, as indeed St. Paul himself describes them. “*To the weak*,” he says, “*I became as weak, that I might gain the weak ; I am made all things to all men (not by an unlawful departure from integrity of character, but by acquiescing, or at least exerting, no violent opposition, in things totally indifferent)*”

that I may by all means save some ; and this," he adds, " I do for the Gospel's sake ¹."

The Apostle was no sooner made sensible of the propriety of conforming to the advice of his pious friends, than he joined the men who were under the vow, the very next day, and entered with them into the temple, for the purpose of accomplishing the necessary sacrifice.

How short-sighted and inadequate are the best resolutions of men ! Nothing is more wonderful than those almost visible interpositions of Divine Providence, which bring forth a whole train of important consequences from one *apparently* insignificant event. Something of this, every one of us may perceive in the ordinary current of our lives. The future destination of St. Paul's labours is entirely changed by this, as it were, accidental purpose, to fulfil the Nazarite's vow. Had he continued still at liberty, he might have travelled through other countries, and propagated his holy doctrines as far as Alexander led his armies ; the East might have been gilded by a new sun, and remote China might have owned a Redeemer, as early as the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. But God, who rules the world, directs his own purposes ; and his chosen servant Paul, instead of performing the calm services of religious obedience, finds himself (innocent as he was) involved in all the perplexities of a criminal prosecution. Let it then be

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 22, 23.

our comfort under the pressure of unavoidable calamities, to reflect that God has some purpose to fulfil in us, either with respect to ourselves, or others, which we do not at first discover. Acquiesce then implicitly with the Almighty will ; and repeat the language of Eli, “ It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good ¹.”

When the term of the Apostle’s purification was almost ended, a tumult was excited by certain Asiatic Jews who had probably known him at Ephesus, and were now arrived at Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. The charges exhibited against him were very different from those which James and the elders expected. He was not accused of conforming, but of acting contrary to the Jewish law ; and particularly of the heinous offence, in their sight, of bringing a Grecian into a forbidden court of the temple. The very courtesy of St. Paul would have prevented an infringement of a custom so well known, and so long established. The fact is, the accusation was not true ; for though Trophimus, the Ephesian, was with him in the city, it does not appear that he had accompanied him to the temple. If that had really been the case, *Trophimus*, and not Paul, should have been the object of their resentment. But personal enmity was the foundation of their conduct. Impelled by this blind, this cruel guide, which turns wisdom from the helm, and hurls reason from her throne, these men

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

of Asia took the law into their own hands, and rudely seizing upon the venerable Apostle, they called upon the multitude for assistance, “crying out, Men of Israel, help : this is the man that teacheth all men every where (as we ourselves can witness who have heard him in our own country which is far distant from hence) against the people, and the law and this place,” that your nation should be dispersed, the law of Moses which you so justly esteem, should be abolished, and that this very temple, this beautiful building hardly yet finished, which is peculiarly holy as the temple of the great Jehovah, shall be utterly ruined and destroyed ; and besides, not contented with such defamation, he has proceeded wilfully to pollute this holy place, by introducing into it one forbidden by the law. Less than such an accusation as this would have been sufficient to excite a tumult, where the minds of the people were previously irritated against the Christians. They did not forget the holy ground on which they trod, even when they were endeavouring to execute their revenge. They “drew him *out of the temple*,” lest it should be defiled with his blood ; and the gates were immediately shut against them. They were then in an outer court, at the corner of which Herod had built a fortress which overlooked the whole building, which he called after the name of a celebrated, but dissolute, Roman, well known in Egypt, and in the neighbouring countries, the tower, or fortress of Antonia. In this castle, a Roman garrison resided to keep the peace of the city ; and when an account of this tu-

mult was brought to the commanding officer, he summoned his garrison, rushed down the stairs among the people, and rescued the Apostle from their hands. “ When they saw the chief captain and soldiers, they left beating of Paul.” The providence of God was conspicuous. The tumult ceased in a moment, as when the Son of God spake to the tumultuous waves, and “ *immediately* there was a great calm.” The chief captain then approached, and took Paul into custody, and, supposing him a notorious offender, bound him with two chains; that is, with one to each of his guards.

All the circumstances of the narrative in this place bear the greatest resemblance to the truth. The scene of these transactions, and the circumstances which attend them, are such as authentic history has described. They are so related by St. Luke, as to bring us to the very spot, and place a very lively impression of it before our eyes. The dialogue too proceeds in a very natural manner, and such as we may easily imagine to have occurred. Lysias, the Roman tribune, enquires into the cause of the tumult, and how far the prisoner was concerned in it; and finding no satisfactory answer to his questions, he orders Paul to be carried up into the castle. The movement of Paul re-excites the clamour. The people still demand that he should suffer a capital punishment. “ They followed after, crying, Away with him;” an expression too well understood in popular governments.

As he was upon the stairs, just entering the

castle gate, being “borne thither of the soldiers for fear of the violence of the people,” Paul, cool and collected through the whole proceeding, requested of the tribune, in the Greek language, that he might be permitted to speak to him. The tribune, having from the first imagined him to have been a noted rebel, an Egyptian, who not long before, for a seditious purpose, had led into the desert “four thousand men that were murderers,” (that is, part of a dangerous society of Sicarii, or assassins, so called from a short dagger¹ which they used, who at that time infested the city of Jerusalem) and whose leader had fled after his party had been defeated by Felix, the governor, at the mount of Olives, expressed a surprise that he should speak Greek, when he was a native of Egypt. But Paul immediately disavowed the imputation, and acquainted the tribune both *who* and *what* he was; requesting, with some earnestness, as he was no impostor, that he might be allowed to address the people.

From the stairs of the fortress, then, observe the Christian orator plead his own cause. He holds out his fettered hands, in token that he *entreated* to be heard. And when he had obtained a profound silence, he spake to them in the Hebrew, or Syro-Chaldaic language; preferring that dialect to the Greek, as better understood by the common people; and probably as desirous of conciliating their favour in the character of an Hebrew,

¹ Sica.

rather than in that of an Hellenistic Jew, for whom they might have mistaken him, and against whom they entertained an inveterate prejudice.

The Apostle judiciously addresses this tumultuous assembly with as much solemnity and respect, as if he had been before a regular court of justice. "Men, Brethren, and Fathers! hear ye my defence," my apology, the reasons for my conduct, which I now lay before you. This serious introduction arrested their attention; "they kept the *more silence*," when he proceeded, beginning his discourse with the words he had before used to the chief captain—"I verily am a man which am a Jew, born at Tarsus (as I said) a city of Cilicia; and far from differing from yourselves, I was educated in your own principles in this very city, at the feet of Gamaliel, a celebrated teacher of the Pharisees, whom some of you may have heard of, neither can any of you be more zealous for the national faith, than I was at the period to which I allude. Give me credit, that it was not without the most cogent and convincing motives, that I was afterwards induced to alter my opinions." He then proceeds to detail, what has been before related in the course of this history, a plain account of his excessive severity against the Christians, and his supernatural conversion on the road to Damascus.

The circumstances of this account differ no otherwise from the former, than as a person relating the same story at a distant period of time. One variation only need be noticed, which it is not

difficult to reconcile. In this place it is said, that the persons who were with him, “saw the light, but heard *not* the voice of him that spake to him.” St. Luke, in his own person, says, that “they stood speechless, *hearing* a voice, but seeing no man ¹.” The word *voice* here signifies an *articulate* voice. The sound indeed they heard, but the voice they did not understand. Of the same nature was the voice from heaven which answered our Saviour’s prayer—“The people that stood by and heard it, said that it thundered; others said, An angel spake to him ².”

After relating the charge of Ananias to him, that he should be a witness unto *all men*, foreign nations as well as native Jews, of the truth of this new profession of religion, he acquaints them with an immediate revelation which he had himself had in the temple; that he saw Christ in a vision, who commanded him to depart speedily from Jerusalem, and preach to others that Gospel which they rejected; that he remonstrated with the Saviour, alleging that the knowledge of his former conduct was more likely to injure, than to promote, so righteous a cause, but that Jesus had over-ruled his objection, and strictly commanded him to “depart,” for it was his will to “send him far hence unto the *Gentiles*.”

Like the watch-word of a party, this single expression, that he was sent to the *Gentiles*, was sufficient to excite the utmost indignation of his hearers. They exclaimed violently against him,

¹ Chap. ix. 7.

² John xii. 29.

and proceeded to show an inclination of executing speedy vengeance. The tribune himself began to be a convert to their suspicions. So difficult is it for the human mind to preserve itself unbiassed by insidious observations! Alas! malice is a subtle foe. It creeps forward by unsuspected paths. It kills in whispers. Lysias, in the first instance, had resisted the impetuosity of the populace, and rescued his prisoner for a legal trial. But now, the popular voice prevails. He commands Paul to be brought into the castle, and to induce him to confess his true situation, orders him to be "examined by scourging," the cruel custom of a nation calling itself *great*. Under much bodily pain, inflicted for the purpose of extorting confession, many innocent persons have pleaded guilty. Let me then justly extol the excellent constitution of this country, which has totally abolished whatever traces of darker ages had been left among us. Torture, in any shape, or in any circumstances, is always to be deprecated. The mind of man was originally stamped by Divine Providence with a freedom of will. Let that be freely exerted. "We are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free¹." But if our freedom be controuled by cruel and unnecessary severities, we then step into a state of slavery; and we know, in *ancient language*, that *the day that makes a man a slave takes away half his virtue*.

"And as they bound him with thongs," preparing

¹ Gal. iv. 13.

him for this ignominious punishment, “ Paul said to the centurion,” the second in command, whose duty it was to see that the orders of the tribune were executed, “ Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a *Roman*, and *uncondemned* ?” This was an unexpected question, and perplexed both the centurion, and the chief captain, to whom it was delivered. “ Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman.” So great was the depressed state of this conquered nation, that an indignity bore not the same meaning when applied to a Roman and a *Jew*. What ! Is there not an equal law ? Or did they talk of liberty and equality, like a neighbouring people, and feel it not ? Thank God, my brethren, that what the Romans knew not, and the French, after all their revolutions, have not yet been able to understand ¹, you are so happy as to possess. Continue thankful for the blessing ; for that equality of rights which protects the poorest man in Britain, and places him in a situation above those of other nations, which arrogate to themselves high-sounding names with far inferior privileges.

But the centurion adds—“ and *uncondemned* ?” This also cannot happen to a Briton. To the tribune it made no part of the enquiry. “ Tell me (said he to St. Paul, in that humiliating condition) art thou a citizen of Rome ? He said, Yea. The chief captain said, How does this agree with your present appearance ? I, who am a man of rank,

¹ A.D. 1806.

purchased this privilege with a great sum. But I said Paul, was *free-born*." This short, but interesting conversation, in which, it is probable, that Lysias was made sensible that Paul spoke the truth, put an end for the present, to Paul's personal sufferings, but did not allay the tribune's fears. "Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him, and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." But Paul's soul was affected by very different sensations. He felt no tremors. He was subject to no fears. We have before seen him in a prison, and marked his steady piety, and perfect resignation. He knew whose steps he was called upon to follow, and therefore, with his eye fixed upon that point which he could never consider with indifference, he sang praises to God, and then soundly slept the sleep of innocence, though fastened to two Roman guards.

It will not be supposed that a citizen of Rome was exempt from the ordinary punishment of a crime, but it was usual, in order to exalt the Roman character, first to deprive the culprit of his privilege, and then to inflict his punishment. St. Paul's conduct, on this occasion, shews his knowledge of the Roman law ; and his endeavour, by this mean, to avert the painful part of his punishment, by pleading his privilege, was a prudent and justifiable step. It would have added nothing to his merit as a suffering Christian, to have received a correction, which he knew how to avoid. An involuntary infliction is of a different nature. That

inevitable burthen he bears for his Master's sake, and accepts no deliverance which would betray his trust. When *we* are called upon to suffer, let us take this great Apostle for our model, who advises his converts to be "followers of him, even as he also was of Christ¹."

Upon a review of the transactions of this day, several important reflections will naturally arise in our minds. When we see a good man persecuted, we are ready to enquire, how we should act were we in his situation? And very confident indeed should we be of our own strength, more confident than it becomes true Christians, if we did not entertain serious fears for the integrity of our character. But the mercy of Him, whose grace is at all times sufficient for us, supported his holy Apostle, and is able to support us under severe and oppressive trials. He was exposed to the threats, and more than the threats, of an enraged populace. We are exposed to the assaults of inveterate and tumultuous passions, to dangerous and seductive temptations. He defended himself by sound argument, and did not convince. We content ourselves with feeble expostulations, and fall a sacrifice.

It may be remarked, that whenever St. Paul defended himself against the accusations of his enemies, whether by a public harangue, or in his epistles, he is never backward in condemning the cruel and inconsiderate conduct of his youth. Indeed, a reflection on the unspeakable mercy, which he

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

experienced in his riper years, naturally arises from a deep conviction of his unregenerate condition. Plain, open, and ingenuous, he tells his tale, not merely in the imposing language of an orator, but as an honest man. "I was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. My heart was as prejudiced, and as impenetrable as yours. My learning was no advantage to my religion, because I adapted it to unworthy purposes: and zeal was dangerous in my hands. I persecuted, under the authority of the governors of the state, *this way*, this happy way, of attaining salvation, unto the death, even the death of vile malefactors, and should have continued this violent persecuting conduct to the greatest extremity, had not the heavenly vision of Him whom I considered as my enemy, called me to a knowledge of my own heart, and by the immediate influence of his grace, wrought my conversion in a most miraculous manner. Behold! here I am. God hath chosen me to "know his will, to see that just One—the *Lord our righteousness*—to hear his voice, and to be an Apostle of the Gentiles, a witness unto *all men* of what I have heard and seen."

Through this eminent and chosen servant of Christ, my brethren, is this holy vision presented to our eyes. We, like him, have wandered in darkness; and, thoughtless and inconsiderate, if not wilfully blind, have rejected the light of life. We have often persecuted the good way, even unto death. We have been immersed in trespasses and sins. But the day of restoration, I trust, by the blessing of God, hath risen upon many of us. May it soon

rise upon all ! “ Suddenly there hath shone from heaven a great light round about us,” as a joyful signal that “ the day-spring from on high hath visited us.” “ Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

I pray God that this may be the case with us ; that with St. Paul, we may “ bear witness unto all men of what *we* have heard and seen.” Each of us hath a kingdom within us, which calls for constant regulations. Here at least we may “ bear witness of the truth, and the truth shall make us free.” And then, not in Jerusalem only, not in our own houses, and in our own families, shall this witness be made known, but Christian righteousness shall be diffused on every side ; there shall be no region, or country, where it shall not be perfectly known ; no distinctions of rank, or condition, shall obstruct its progress ; for, in this sacred calling, “ there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free,” but one uniform, true, and undivided faith, where “ CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL ¹.”

¹ Col. iii. 11.

LECTURE XXIII.

ACTS XXII. 30. XXIII.

St. Paul brought before the Council. — Vision. — Conspiracy against him. — Removal from Jerusalem to Cæsarea. — A. D. 60.

To a mind conscious of its own integrity, and sensible of the sanctifying graces of the Holy Spirit of God, no place can be obscure, no dungeon remote, no situation can terrify by the apprehension of overwhelming or unreasonable fears. The rising sun will shine as placidly, as cheerfully, through the grated window of a prison, and bless the morning devotion of its pious inhabitant, as into the gayest apartment of the most splendid palace. Thus rose St. Paul on the morning after his imprisonment in the castle of Antonia.

Released from his chains, and as unfettered in his conscience, he is brought by the Roman Tribune before the assembled Sanhedrim, that his guilt, or his innocence, might publicly appear.

Nothing could be more free and unembarrassed than the conduct of the Apostle on this occasion. Placed before the tribunal, he *attentively surveyed* the Council. He cast his quick eye around the

Court, that he might note the characters, and perhaps the *faces*, of his Judges ; and, from circumstances which might arise, find matter for his defence. His first address was the spontaneous effusion of an honest heart.—“ Men and Brethren ! I have lived in all good conscience before God, until this day.”—What ! is this the language of that Paul whom we have seen one of the greatest enemies of the Church of Christ ; “ haling,” with rudeness and incivility, much more with savage cruelty, “ and delivering into prison, both men and women :”—“ *beyond measure*, as he himself confesses, persecuting the Church of God and wasting it ?”—It is not likely that he, who makes this confession, would plead the consolatory approbation of a *good conscience* in every moment of his diversified life. He rather confines the expression to his political conduct with respect to the Jews ; for their religious and civil polity were too closely united, ever to be wholly separated. His language indeed will only bear this interpretation—“ I have lived,” that is, I have lived *as a Citizen*, which is the meaning of the original : I have conducted myself in a civil capacity in all *good conscience*. This he *could* say in opposition to any accusation that might be brought against him, for entertaining seditious, or rebellious principles. Even in the errors of his conscience, he was no enemy to his nation. When his conduct was the most reprehensible with respect to the profession of Christianity, he was promoting to the utmost of his power, nay *beyond* all reasonable *measure*, according to his own ingenuous acknow-

ledgement, the law of Moses, in which he was educated.

But does the Apostle intimate, that *sincerity of intention* was his apology when he was cruelly persecuting the peaceful followers of Christ? By no means. He knew the contrary. He knew that the Jewish religion did not authorise persecution in that sense, however prejudiced the people of the Jews might be, or however justly they might punish delinquents judicially condemned. St. Paul himself had been entrusted, to a certain extent, with the executive power of government, which he intemperately used; and though he says, in another place, “he did it ignorantly in unbelief,” yet he does not excuse himself to his secret conscience, but for this, as well as other causes, he humbly and penitently styles himself “*the chief of sinners.*”

A proper consideration of this declaration of St. Paul, compared with his radical change of heart, will correct that erroneous principle which would excuse an irregular practice, if founded upon good intention. This is one of the insidious maxims of the present day, which, if indiscriminately adopted, would, in the opinion of a pious modern writer¹, form an apology for the atrocities of a *Clement*, or a *Ravaillac*, of any infuriate madman or assassin, who might imagine himself an instrument selected by Providence, to avenge the cause of heaven. That an erroneous practice will not be imputed to any

¹ Wilberforce's Practical View of Religion.

one whose intentions are sincere, and that a man's belief is of no importance, provided he lives what is usually called, however different from its real state, *a good life*, are doctrines pregnant with danger, and totally repugnant to sound and impartial reason, as well as inconsistent with the whole voice of revelation. Providence hath kindly and diffusively administered the means of knowledge. There are few instances indeed of profound and invincible ignorance. When they do occur, we must leave them to the forbearance of an all-wise, and all-merciful Judge. But when talents and abilities are perverted to maintain opinions entirely opposite both to revealed religion and rational practice, when sophistry usurps the throne of reason, and human judgment presumes to level to its own capacity the unerring dictates of divine wisdom, in vain may any one, actuated by such sentiments, make use of the language of the Apostle :—" I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Conscience, *a good conscience*, is of a very different texture. It springs from such a vital change both of conduct and opinions, as St. Paul experienced, and eloquently and emphatically describes, when a good and gracious God opened the eye of his understanding, and called him out of darkness into his marvellous light¹." May we all endeavour to avoid delusion in so important a point! It is not what *we think*, or *men say*. "*The testimony of our conscience*" has a deeper root. It is a tender plant,

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

and requires a genial soil. It withers before the touch of all impurity ; but revives and flourishes by the sustenance of that refreshing stream, that *well of living water*, which springeth up unto everlasting life.

This noble declaration of the Apostle met with a reception which he did not expect. The High Priest, Ananias, chief Judge of the Sanhedrim, offended either by the manner or matter of St. Paul's address, ordered the attendants of the Court to smite him on the mouth. This unmerited indignity roused the natural warmth of the Apostle's temper. He turns upon the Chief Ruler with an asperity of language, which indeed, after a moment's recollection he soon retracted ; and proves that such sudden sallies of a warm imagination may glance into the bosom of a good man, and betray the imperfection of his nature ; but that the dictates of his religion, and his well regulated mind, forbid them to rest there.—“ God shall smite thee, thou whited wall !” This expression has been considered, and with much reason, as prophetic of the death of Ananias, which happened, as the Jewish historian informs us, not long after, in a sedition occasioned by his own son. His palace was destroyed, and he was dragged from the place where he had secreted himself, and slain by one of that desperate gang of assassins [Sicarii] mentioned in the last Lecture. His character in history, answers the description here given of him, and justifies the address of the Apostle : “ God shall smite thee, thou *whited* wall !” In his situation of Judge he ought not to have given such matter of offence, by insulting an uncon-

demned prisoner in an open court of justice. Thy appearance is that of a venerable judge, but thy heart is composed of different materials. With every allowance for the Apostle's feelings, no apology will be offered for the *heat* of the expression. Though the language of Heaven was put into his mouth by the prophetic admonition, the conduct of the *natural man* was uncontrouled.

A stronger reproof of *hasty* language will not easily be found, than in contrasting this incident with the mild complacent behaviour of Christ upon a similar occasion. "When he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the High Priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me¹?" When the same question, was asked St. Paul, "Revilest thou God's High Priest?" he was obliged, with shame, to confess, that he had hastily transgressed an injunction of the law, which enjoined a particular reverence to be paid to all civil Magistrates. "I wist not, Brethren, that he was the High Priest."—Many reasons are assigned why St. Paul did not know Ananias. Some imagine he did not acknowledge the legality of his appointment: others, that he did not observe his person. Perhaps it would not be easy to ascertain the cause; and we must give the Apostle credit that he did not wilfully violate the truth. One reflection only, trite it may be, and

¹ John xviii. 22, 23.

obvious, but at all times seasonable, I would wish to impress, as resulting from the expression. Let no word escape from your lips till you have considered its propriety, both with respect to matter, time, and place. I do not recommend an artful or a formal deliberation in our speech, but to endeavour to possess such a well-governed disposition of mind, as not to permit any hasty, or untimely observation, much less any dangerous, sinful, or indecorous expression, to escape from us. “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life¹.”—“By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned².”

This first interruption of public business having a little subsided, the Apostle, once more surveying the assembly, perceived that it consisted of a mixed number of Pharisees and Sadducees, Jewish sects, as we have had occasion to remark, violently in opposition to each other, both in principles and conduct. Human prudence, suggested, no doubt, by divine inspiration, came again to his assistance, and delivered him from those whose *united* vehemence would soon have accomplished his destruction. “Men and brethren,” he exclaimed, if you wish to know my particular opinions, and from whom those opinions sprung, “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;” I hold certain doctrines in common with some of you; “of the *hope and resurrection of the dead*, I am called in question.”

¹ Prov. iv. 23.

² Matt. xii. 37.

This declaration was likely to make Ananias still more his enemy ; “ for he was, as Josephus tells us, by sect a Sadducee, the most censorious and uncharitable people upon the face of the earth, and a disbeliever of the doctrine here so openly asserted.” The Apostle took the advantage of those points of doctrine, which the Christians and the Pharisees equally espoused, a belief in the resurrection of the dead, and of a spiritual state of existence. Highly as the Pharisees might be condemned for their hypocritical and formal adherence to the letter of the law, in opposition to the genuine conviction which ought to influence the heart, their tenets were less dangerous, and more easily removed, than the cool determined scepticism of the Sadducees ; who neither expected, nor believed, in the rewards or punishments of a future world.

As practical inference is one great object of these Lectures ; and as, in this place, these celebrated Jewish sects are more particularly brought forward to the eye, I shall beg your indulgence for a few moments to draw a short comparison between the Pharisees and Sadducees of former days, with certain descriptions of persons, which may be found among ourselves.

The Pharisees, St. Paul himself makes the distinction, held some opinions which were *not erroneous*, but these were so corrupted by human traditions, so distorted by vain and fanciful representations, that they lost their original and intrinsic value. The venerable and ancient injunctions of their own lawgiver were rendered inefficient, if not,

in many instances, were totally abrogated, by an unqualified observance of ordinances, not equally authentic. And in what, my brethren, do we differ from them, when we esteem the revealed will of the blessed God, less than what has been called the religion, or law of Nature? Such a law doubtless exists, and exists in the breast of every man, *his conscience bearing witness*¹; but if we knew no other law, or knowing it, did not conform to it, we should be like untutored savages, or civilized barbarians. However excellent the deductions of reason, and I would allow them all their merit, can they be esteemed of higher value than an immediate and express revelation from Heaven?—a revelation confirmed by infallible witnesses, and authentic, as miracles, and wonders, and signs, can make it. But it is blindness, judicial blindness, the punishment of *wilful* error, which obscures the bright beams of everlasting day.

The Pharisees too, while they were the strong advocates for the public observation of the law, in their retirements became a *law unto themselves*. This may be the case with some of us; but in common estimation, hypocrisy will not be esteemed a general vice of the present times. Too many among us are more apt to throw aside the appearances, which *they* were so anxious to observe. There was a modesty even in vicious propensities, which modern manners have very much discarded. Whatever was the radical character of the Phari-

¹ Rom. ii. 15.

sees, they never neglected the service of the temple; the hour of prayer brought them together. But we, at once devoid of shame and fear, “*profane the sabbath and are blameless.*” I say no more on so important a topic: but what manner of men can we be, when the Pharisees themselves will *rise up in judgment against us and condemn us!*

The other sect were Sadducees. And there is no one acquainted with their principles, but must conclude that it still exists, even where the light of Christianity hath shone with resplendent brightness. These were free-thinkers of the age in which they lived; and because they would not be bound by Pharisaical fetters, and as they chose to express it, believe *every thing*, they were resolved to believe *nothing*. And is not this the case at present? Has not the present age trembled to its very basis, from the contagion of these pernicious principles? Are we not still suffering from their pressure?—Who were they that overturned kingdoms, and spread abroad ruin, desolation, and death? They were Sadducees. Who are they that disturb society by dissipation, and turn into ridicule the voice of sober reproof? They are Sadducees. Who are they that insidiously circulate their dangerous and perplexing doubts among the well-meaning, but ignorant, multitude? They are Sadducees; *the same Sadducees* who, in other societies, more openly avow their infidelity. Who are they that, acting upon these principles, (consistently enough!) deprive many an honest family of peace, by seducing the innocent, and insinuating impure doctrines

into unsuspecting breasts? They cannot by *any* interpretation, or perversion of names, be *Christians*, they *must* be Sadducees; for they say, at least in effect, that “there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit.” Since some of these sects, then, are more than suspected to flourish among ourselves, and since it has been observed¹ that, during our Saviour’s ministry it does not appear that even one Sadducee was converted by his preaching, let his solemn admonition still sound in our ears—“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees².”

After the declaration which St. Paul had made of his opinions, the assembly became violently agitated; “the multitude was divided.” “There arose a great cry—a *great dissension*.” The pride, or rather the arrogant assumption, of superior knowledge, has too often fatally disunited more than one legislative council. Introduce humility, one grain of true *Christian* humility, and the most aspiring mind will descend to the level of rational wisdom; the loudest demagogue will be silent. Had numbers prevailed, it is likely Paul would have found friends in the majority of the Council; for “the Scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part,” adopted the argument of Gamaliel upon a former occasion, and “strove, saying, We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, *let us not fight against God*.” But the Chief Captain, seeing order disturbed in the Sanhedrim,

¹ Guardian, No. 93.

² Matt. xvi. 6.

and supposing his prisoner in danger of his life, sends for a guard of soldiers from the garrison of Antonia, and once more conducts Paul to the castle. By various means are the purposes of divine Providence accomplished. The union of Herod and Pontius Pilate led the way to the crucifixion of Christ: the disagreement between the Sadducees and Pharisees, on this occasion, saved the life of the Apostle Paul.

After so eventful an interview with the Sanhedrim, and after having pursued a line of conduct which some, who have not properly considered it, have condemned, what a consolation was it to the imprisoned servant of Jesus, to be favoured, the following night, with an immediate vision of his Lord and Master! To have *His* approbation in so critical a moment, was more than comfort; it was solid and extatic happiness. So may the good man resting his head upon his pillow, though not favoured by an immediate revelation, receive the consolatory testimony of an approving conscience, and through that medium, of an approving God. This may be considered as the true interpretation of the wise Man's remark—"A good man is satisfied from himself¹."

But much as the Apostle was consoled by the heavenly vision, it presented before him a long prospective view of his future sufferings, in different and distant countries, before the arrival of that hour, which was to place upon his head the crown

¹ Prov. xiv. 14.

of everlasting life.—“ Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”

It will afford matter of wonderful reflection to observe how, by *second causes*, not perceptible to human eyes, yet naturally arising from common occurrences, the event of this revelation was brought to pass. The first step towards it was as unlikely to contribute to its accomplishment, as any which could possibly happen. Forty Jews, vexed and disappointed at St. Paul's escape from the sentence of the Sanhedrim, entered into a horrid conspiracy to murder him the next time he should be brought before his Judges; and, what is more to the disgrace of these rulers, their minds were so debased, so degenerated, and so exasperated against the great Apostle of the Christian cause, as to propose to take a part in such a scene of murder. “ They came to the Chief Priests and Elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing till we have slain Paul. Now therefore, ye, with the Council, signify to the Chief Captain, that he bring him down to you to-morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him, and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.” Vain threat! and ineffective combination! *That* disconcerted their plan, “ which maketh the devices of the people to be of none effect, and casteth out the counsel of princes ¹,”—the arm and direction of a superintending Providence.

¹ Psalm xxxiii. 10.

We have before had occasion to remark, that frequently some obscure and apparently insignificant cause brings about, what neither wit, wisdom, or the weight of earthly power, could possibly accomplish. The intended scheme of these conspirators (it does not appear by what means) was made known to Paul's sister's son, who immediately conveyed the tidings to the Apostle. St. Paul, confiding in the promise and protection of God, at the same time using such means as the circumstance of the case required, directs him to disclose all that had come to his knowledge, to the friendly and compassionate Tribune.

The character of Lysias rises in our estimation, as occurrences of difficulty present themselves before him. If we except the precipitate conduct which commanded Paul to be examined by *scourging*; and even this may be attributed more to law or custom, than personal authority; he acquitted himself throughout, not only with the discretion and intrepidity, but with the courtesy of a Roman officer. "Then the Chief Captain *took the young man by the hand*, and went with him *aside privately*, and asked him, What is it that thou hast to tell me?" This minute circumstance could only have been inserted in the narrative for the purpose of expressing the writer's approbation of such courteous conduct, and to shew that the personal safety, and even the comfort of an imprisoned offender, were objects of considerable attention to a humane and benevolent governor.

Lysias took a decided part on the occasion, and after having given orders for a sufficient guard, and

provided, with his usual humanity, a beast to carry the venerable Apostle on so long a journey, he sent them by night from the castle, on their way to Cæsarea, where Felix, the Governor of Judea, under the Roman Emperor, at that time resided. And lest Felix, from this extraordinary secrecy and care, should imagine that the prisoner was a notorious state offender, the noted Egyptian rebel, as he himself had imagined, he explains, by a letter, all the particulars of his situation, and the orders he had given, for the witnesses against him to appear before Felix at Cæsarea. The first night the guard of foot soldiers conducted Paul to Antipatris, and being then beyond the reach of the conspirators, they returned to the garrison, but the Apostle, with the horsemen, proceeded to Cæsarea. The prisoner, with his accusation, was presented to Felix; and when he understood that he belonged to the province of Cilicia, he ordered him to be kept in Herod's Judgment Hall, a prætorium erected by Herod the Great when he enlarged and rebuilt the city, till his accusers should arrive from Jerusalem, and prefer their indictment against him.

“Ye shall be brought before Governors, and Kings, for my sake¹,” said the Lord of Life. And again, “They shall put you out of the Synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service².”—We have here a striking instance of the truth of our Saviour's warnings to his Disciples, in the person of St. Paul. Nothing but inveterate enmity, founded on the

¹ Matt. x. 18.

² John xvi. 2.

pure and holy principles of the Apostle, could have induced *more than forty men*, strangers most probably to his person, to have bound themselves by so solemn, and so horrible an oath, to have sought his destruction. The life of one man seems a very inadequate object for such a desperate combination of assassins. But let it be remembered, that *through him* a deadly blow was aimed at the heart of Christianity itself. St. Paul bore too warm a testimony to the truth of revelation; he was too strong an advocate in his Master's cause, too violent an opposer of iniquity under every shape, too zealous for that salvation which rests in faith only, a pure, lively and efficacious faith, to escape the open assaults of a prejudiced and corrupted Sanhedrim, or the secret machinations of base and wily conspirators.

While we reflect on this incident, and the word *conspiracy* dwells upon our lips, we are ready to inquire, whether so atrocious an attempt was confined to the age of St. Paul? Alas! not many years have elapsed since the discovery of a conspiracy more extensive, and not less dangerous to the best interests of Christianity, which shook to the foundation most of the civil and religious establishments of Europe¹. A combination of *Philosophers*, as they have been mis-named, who reckoned at least one monarch in their number, silently and secretly conspired together, to overturn the ancient faith of Christians. The watch-word of their party was an expression too blasphemous

¹ See History of Jacobinism, by L'Abbè Barruel: and Robinson's Proofs of a Conspiracy.

and indecent, and the allusion too shocking to the feelings of the pious, to be repeated in this place. Something they did effect; for infidelity, with its servile and sanguine attendant, Anarchy, carried death and desolation in her train. The removal of the veil by the publication of the posthumous works of that Monarch, and the disclosure of the true intentions of the Voltaires, Diderots, D'Alemberts, and Rousseaus of that day, happily brought back to reason and religion, several who had been more than tainted, had been deeply polluted with their execrable opinions. They adopted the very method recommended by the Jewish conspirators in the case of St. Paul. "Bring him down into the Council, as though ye would enquire something of him more perfectly." The expression of an inclination to discover moral beauties in the *system* of Christianity, was the pretence of these philosophers. But in executing this pretended plan, they entrapped the unwary by insinuations, and involved the well-intentioned in an inextricable labyrinth of doubts.

I will produce one instance from the writings of the last of these philosophers that I have named, to shew you with how much ease they elevate, with how keen a weapon they destroy. "I acknowledge," says this author, in the person of a Savoyard Vicar addressing his pupil, (the more dangerous for the character assumed) "I acknowledge that the majesty which reigns in the Sacred Writings fills me with a solemn kind of astonishment, and that the sanctity of the Gospel speaks in a powerful and command-

ing language to the feelings of my heart.”—Thus far the ingenuous pupil listens with delight, and acquiesces in the observation. But mark what follows. “After all,” he adds, “this same Gospel is full of things that are incredible, of things which are repugnant to reason, and which no man of sense can either conceive, or admit¹.” If the pupil should not be sufficiently established in the faith, but should unwarily receive bold assertion for indubitable truth, he will fall a dreadful sacrifice before a treacherous and deceitful altar.

When such instances occur, we may refer to the language of St. Paul’s nephew to the Tribune Ly-sias.—“Do not thou yield unto them, for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, who have bound themselves with an oath (which was also the case with the French and German Illuminati) that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him.” Blessed be God! in the detection of both conspiracies, *the arm of the Lord hath been revealed*. How long the dregs of such philosophy may be permitted to continue amongst us, He only knows, who *in the greatness of our folly suffers us to go astray*. *Lack of true knowledge* is denounced as the punishment of sin. Let us diligently apply our

¹ Rousseau’s *Emilius*. These times have not so long elapsed as to render these observations irrelevant in the present edition of this work. On the contrary, they constitute an *everlasting lesson*: and the pious mind ought to be continually on its guard against such principles, from whatever quarter they may come, lest consequences should occur, which would be as fatal as they would be unexpected.

hearts to that *wisdom which cometh from above*, that its happy consequences may remain with us, and with our children for ever.

But before our indignation rests from the prospect of these days of dreadful principles, enquire my Brethren, whether a dangerous conspiracy does not still prevail. Are there none among us who “take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed ¹?” Are there none who “go about to establish their own righteousness, and have not submitted to the righteousness of God ²?” Are there none who have “given themselves over unto lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness ³?” Are there none who shelter themselves under good *intentions*, and continue to pursue “the error of Balaam for reward ⁴?” If there are none, then there is no conspiracy; then may we descend safely, as St. Paul might otherwise have done, from the castle into the court of justice, and fear neither Sanhedrim nor assassin. But alas! most of us are sensible that this is not the case. We stand as condemned criminals before the bar, and cast ourselves on the mercy of our Judge. May he who “justifies the ungodly ⁵” undertake our cause; and through Him may we be accepted among his righteous servants! Amen!

¹ Psalm ii. 2.

² Rom. x. 3.

³ Eph. iv. 19.

⁴ Jude ver. 11.

⁵ Rom. iv. 5.

LECTURE XXIV.

ACTS XXIV.

St. Paul accused before Felix—Characters of Felix and Drusilla—Paul's Defence—His Discourse—Detention in Prison—Arrival of Festus. Cæsarea. A. D. 60—62.

THE character of a good man, which so naturally and so pleasantly impresses itself on congenial minds, excites very different sensations in the breasts of the wicked. “When will he die, and his name perish?” was the severe and inveterate wish of the enemies of David. “Away with him, away with him,” was the still more decisive language of the enemies of Christ. And even in the early days of our blessed Saviour's preaching, when his persuasive eloquence seemed to make some impression on the multitude, accompanied by miracles of love both to their bodies and their souls, the best commendation which some of them could afford, was *faint praise* indeed; whilst others continued to malign his purest intentions: “some said, He is a good man, others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people¹.”

It will not be expected, then, that “the disciple should be above his master, or the servant above

¹ John vii. 12.

his lord. If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household¹ ?”

I am led to this observation by the situation in which we now find the venerable Apostle, arraigned at the bar of Felix, and defending himself against the false insinuations of a professional accuser.

The enmity of the Sanhedrim against Paul, like the personal malignity of an individual, instead of being meliorated by reflection, or the lapse of time, sharpens the sting with which they design to wound. They distrust their own eloquence in so precious a cause, and employ the brilliant talents of a person, well versed, as it appears, in disguising an unwelcome truth, as well as in conveying pleasing accents to a courtly ear. “After five days, Ananias, the high priest, descended with the elders, and with a certain orator, named Tertullus,” to lay their information against Paul, before the governor at Cæsarea.

A short reflection on the history and character of Felix, will throw a considerable light on this part of St. Luke’s narrative. So exactly does his conduct, as described by the Evangelist in the Acts of the Apostles, coincide with those passages of profane writers which mention his name, and record some of his transactions, that we acknowledge the comparison to afford an additional and authentic testimony of the truth of that Gospel which Paul preached.

¹ Matt. x. 24, 25.

After the death of Herod Agrippa, whose miserable end is related in the 12th chapter of this book, Judæa became again a Roman province, over which the Emperors appointed governors. In this station Felix was placed by Claudius Cæsar. At his entrance on his government, he was very successful in appeasing many seditious disturbances, but was destitute of all remorse in carrying his schemes into execution. By means of bribes he procured the assassination of Jonathan, the high priest, who had offended him by some severe, but just representations of his public conduct. The reflection which the Jewish historian makes upon this circumstance, marks the estimation in which he held his character. "*Wicked men*," he says, "are generally impatient of being told their faults¹." Nor is the account of him more lenient, which falls from the pen of the Roman historian. After bestowing some commendation on Pallas, the brother of Felix, he adds, that the latter "did not conduct himself with equal moderation; for being appointed to the government of Judæa, he thought his high station warranted the commission of all kinds of wickedness²." And in another part of his history he remarks, that "Felix employed the authority of his rank, for the purposes of gratifying his cruelty and lust³." The latter expression appears to refer to his marriage with Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa, and the sister of that King Agrippa whom

¹ Jos. Ant. l. xx. c. 6.

² Tac. Ann. l. xii. 53.

³ Tac. Hist. l. v. 9.

we shall soon have occasion to mention. This celebrated female had been married to Azizus, King of the Emesenes, who, for her sake, had embraced the Jewish religion. But Felix, captivated by her beauty, persuaded her to desert her husband; and we shall find her seated by him, at the important moment, when the Apostle's eloquence and truth for once made his face the index of his heart.

It appears from Tacitus, that Felix had been married to Drusilla, the grand-daughter of Anthony and Cleopatra¹; which might be the case, as another Roman writer informs us, that he had been the husband of three queens², probably three king's daughters, or ladies of high rank, two of whom had the same name³. The personal accomplishments of Felix, we may imagine, were at least equal to his rank and connections. How degrading then in the eyes of every honest and good man, to behold such accomplishments prostituted to the lowest vices, such talents lost, and overwhelmed in iniquity! This is an example that should not hastily be passed over. It is the glory of a country to invest good men with dignities; and the glory of those who possess those dignities is, or ought to be, *virtue*. The man does not so much receive honour from the rank, as the rank from the possessor.

The court being set, the Roman advocate Tertullus opened the pleadings with an elaborate

¹ Tac. Hist. l. v. 9.

² Suet. Claud. c. 28.

³ Biscoe's Serm. p. 47.

speech addressed to the vanity of the judge ; *with how much truth*, the preceding delineation of the character of Felix will testify. As there may be, in the worst of men, some semblance of merit, some shadow of a virtue, the designing flatterer will seize that point to display his rhetoric, and delude *him*, whom it is his object to deceive. Felix had been fortunate in repressing a tumultuous disposition, which had disturbed the peace of the province. The orator did not permit a circumstance, so gratifying to his hearer's feelings, to escape him at the very beginning of his speech. " Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, that thou hast established in this province, which is so happy as to call thee governor, great peace and tranquillity, and that the affairs of government in general are well directed by thy providence, we wish to express our thankfulness for thy care and protection ; and have no doubt but thy clemency, thy good temper, and humanity, will indulge us by attending to the few words which I shall have occasion to address to thee." *By thy providence*, a very high strained compliment, alluding, probably, to that supernatural care attributed to the Emperors, when they impiously assumed the character of gods. The oration of Tertullus is divided into three distinct charges. 1. That the prisoner had raised a sedition among the people. 2. That he was the leader of a dangerous religious schism. 3. That he had transgressed the law, by the introduction of an uncircumcised heathen into the temple. He then explains the reason why this trial was brought to

Cæsarea, instead of being heard at Jerusalem. The true motive he totally suppresses ; but insinuates that the Roman tribune prevented it by removing Paul by violence ; and that, by his own authority, he had summoned the witnesses to appear before the governor in person. These things, he adds, upon further investigation, would be found to be true.

I may here be allowed to enquire, whether St. Luke might not insert the whole of this insidious oration, by way of shewing the dangerous tendency of such a species of oratory. Truth is sacred, truth is *one* ; therefore truth ought to be inviolable. “ Great is the earth, high is the heaven, swift is the sun in his course, for he compasseth the heavens round about, and fetcheth his course again to his place in one day. Is He not great that maketh these things ? therefore great is the truth, and stronger than all things. All the earth calleth upon the truth, and the heaven blesseth it ; all works shake and tremble, and with it is no unrighteous thing. As for the truth, it endureth, and is always strong, it liveth and conquereth for evermore. With her there is no respecting of persons or rewards ; but she doeth the things that are just, and refraineth from all unjust and wicked things ; and all men do well like of her works. Neither in her judgment is any unrighteousness, and she is the strength, kingdom, power, and majesty of all ages. Blessed be the God of truth ! Great is the *truth*, and mighty above all things ¹.” This sublime eulogy

¹ 1 Esdras iv. 34, &c.

on one of the sublimest principles of nature, stands in opposition to those insidious harangues, which, even in British courts of judicature, are too frequently calculated to pervert sound reason, and prejudice the truth. A venerable and upright judge indeed presides in the assembly, with his learning to interpret the law ; with his authority to controul the intemperance of language ; with his understanding to investigate the truth. The insinuating flattery of a Tertullus would be rejected with scorn—with scorn also let such *idle words* be rejected as would screen the guilty, or bring the innocent to shame. The pure, genuine administration of justice within this realm is a pattern to the world ; and the praise of that *throne*, that exalted *throne*, *which is established by righteousness*¹.

When the advocate had finished his address, and that part of the Jewish Sanhedrim which stood forth as St. Paul's accusers, had assented to his

¹ The celebrated Lord Chief Justice Coke, in a speech made at an installation of Serjeants, A.D. 1614, observes, " That the common law of England hath always had three adversaries, wrestlers, and perverters of the law, the third of which are *flatterers*."—*Serviens ad legem*, his very denomination (Serjeant at law) he says, doth teach him humility. He must be diligent and labour ; and, which is not the least, though in the last place, he must be faithful and honest, not flatter his client in a wrong, nor bolster out an untruth. Cheeke and Littleton, in King Henry the Sixth's time, were intreated to place a false plea, to save a default in a real action ; viz. to plead that " the waters were so great, that in sixteen days the client could not pass by any place ; which they, holding untrue, refused to do." Malcolm's *Londinium Redivivum*, Vol. II. p. 193.

unwarranted assertions, the Apostle, at a signal from the governor, proceeded to answer the charges which had been brought against him. "Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more chearfully answer for myself." This mode of introduction was a mark of courtesy and true politeness, but no flattery. Felix had been five, or, according to the opinion of a learned commentator¹, seven years governor of Judæa; a long period, when compared with the short duration of his predecessors in the same situation; and therefore the circumstance of Felix being an *experienced* judge, St. Paul thought favourable to his cause, especially as he had just heard such a perversion of truth in his adversary. His reply is divided into three parts, in answer to the three charges of Tertullus. 1. As to sedition; such a design could hardly be attributed to him with reasonable probability, as he had neither time nor opportunity to accomplish it. It was even then, he says, but *twelve* days since he went up to Jerusalem for a purpose widely different; of which five had been spent in prison at Cæsarea; that his demeanor there was peaceable and quiet, and suitable to the holy motive which had brought him to that place. He neither entered into controversial conversations with any man in the temple, where he spent much of his time, neither did he frequent the Synagogues for that purpose, neither did he excite tumults, or promote sedition, in the

¹ Biscoe, p. 44.

city. To prove any of these charges, he dared them to produce witnesses. 2. With respect to the next charge, if such it might be called, he did in part confess himself guilty, but it was such a species of guilt as did not dishonour God, and could not prejudice him in the eye of his judge. "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."—"This way, this holy way which Christ taught, and Christians practise, without renouncing the foundation of their ancient faith, blessed be God! said he, is my way, the way in which I will walk whilst it pleases God to give me life to pursue it. Neither have I reason to call that *heresy* in the bad sense of the expression; for I believe, as they also profess to do themselves, all things that are written *in the law and the prophets*; and, in consequence of that firm belief, I have *hope towards God*, and look forward, as the Pharisees also may be expected to do, to a *resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*." Here the Apostle pauses to bear a noble testimony to his own integrity. "And *herein*, in this holy profession, and in this secure and sacred hope, do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men." "I do not consider my profession of faith as a system of mere speculative opinions, I do not look upon the resurrection, merely as a removal from one state of existence to another, from a troublesome, or even a wicked world, to one of perfect ease and tranquillity; but I look upon it as an awful consideration influenc-

ing my life and manners, dependent on those motives which I am taught by my religion. I consider it as the last great change to which I shall be subject ; and as both *just and unjust* will in that day stand before the Lord our Maker, I always endeavour, by his grace, as a fixed and steady principle, so to fulfil my allotted station, that my portion may be in realms of everlasting glory."

I cannot dismiss this passage without further noting its importance. "Herein do I *exercise* myself;" a word which denotes diligence and exertion, the true foundation of all moral improvement. To this holy duty do I dedicate all the powers both of soul and body. I am as desirous of regulating my mind, as my behaviour, that my conscience, that perception of divine truth implanted in my bosom by the Almighty, may not only not reproach me for neglecting my obligations to God and man, but may afford a gratifying self-approbation, that, through the merits and mediation of my Saviour, my imperfect endeavours have been accepted.

Here we may remark, that we are not only to perform our duty in our allotted station, but that we are to take particular care so to inform ourselves *what that duty is*, that we may not mistake it. This is the emphatic meaning of the word *exercise*. For if we take human duties as they arise before us, and neither consider their aim nor design, neither adapt them to our situation in the world, nor connect them with those principles which alone can make them valuable, we lose all

that we should otherwise have gained ; we “ call evil good, and good evil ;” we are virtuous only, as it were, by accident.

3. The third and last charge, which the Apostle answers, is, that he had profaned the temple by introducing an uncircumcised stranger into one of its courts. This he explains by a reference to the situation in which he was found at the time of his arrest. The expression is very pathetic with which he introduces this part of his answer. After a long absence he was returning to his country ; returning with every mark of kindness and affection. “ After many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings ;” little expecting the return which his charity received. This was indeed an argument which he might urge with good effect. It intimated that he was so far from wishing to injure his countrymen by his return among them, that he came with presents in his hand, and warm benevolence in his heart. “ I came,” he says, “ to bring alms to *my* nation.” How expressive of his patriotic feelings ! as if his own interest was inseparable from that of his country. At this period, he acknowledges he had frequented the temple, but he was unattended either with multitude or tumult. If this was not the case, let any man that was able give a contrary testimony. And even the Sanhedrim, said St. Paul, boldly addressing himself to his accusers—I dare appeal to your own judgments for my innocence, notwithstanding your repeated allegations ; for when I stood before you at Jerusalem, some of you exclaimed, *We find no*

evil in this man, unless indeed you call that evil, which every Pharisee among you professes to believe; that I publicly avowed the holy and important doctrine of the *resurrection of the dead*.

To this argument the Apostle holds, in the whole of this controversy with the great council of the Jews. And to a stronger, he could not cling. He was introducing no new doctrine, but was considerably adding to their belief, both of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, when he preached the resurrection of *Christ*. For, as he says, "if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen¹." But if Christ be risen, as I am able to prove from the most incontrovertible evidence, the converse of the proposition must be true; the resurrection of the dead is established; and the belief of Christianity, in every part, must follow, as a warranted and necessary conclusion.

When the Apostle had finished his defence, we naturally expect to witness his acquittal. But Felix had other designs in view, as his character sufficiently explains. He keeps up, however, the appearance of equity, by promising to re-consider the Apostle's case, when he should make himself master of the subject, and for that purpose that he would inquire of Lysias, the next time he should visit Cæsarea, all the particulars of Paul's situation. Vain and treacherous simulation! He knew enough of them already, if he had properly em-

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 13.

ployed his knowledge. He knew also how he intended to act; "he hoped that money should have been given of Paul, that he might loose him." Here the sordid magistrate appears. How unlike the just judge of Israel, who appealed to *all* the assembled people, as witnesses of his incorruptible integrity. "Whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith¹." An elevated situation is attended with great dangers. The *world*, which fastens itself close enough to the heart in every sphere of life, draws itself still closer, in those which present to it greater temptations. The Devil took our Saviour up on an exceeding high mountain, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the *glory of them*; but the prospect, gorgeous as it was, made no impression on him, because his holy breast was fortified by the blessed Spirit of God. We see then the danger; we see also the remedy. "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, he shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be in the munition of rocks, bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure²."

The interested expectation of Felix, even here, through the over-ruling providence of God, operated to the comfort of Paul, and the furtherance of the faith. The Apostle was well known at

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 8.

² Isaiah xxxiii. 15, 16.

Cæsarea; many of his friends resided there; and therefore, under a limited restraint, the intercourse that was allowed him with them (probably in hopes that some of them would have found that bribe which the governor expected) contributed to the establishment of the Gospel in that eminent city.

During this period, it is more wonderful that all did not submit to the easy and delightful yoke of Christ, than that any should be found who could reject it.

The effect which St. Paul's preaching had upon this dishonourable governor, is a proof that the heart of wickedness may be made to feel, though sheltered beneath a rock of adamant. Curiosity, it is probable, was the motive which induced Felix to hear the Apostle on the awful subject of religion. The same motive, it is likely, prevailed upon his wife Drusilla to be present. Imagine, for a moment, two persons, notoriously flagitious in their characters, seated in the presence of the venerable Paul. Imagine that their characters were known to the Apostle, and that he felt a burning zeal to add them to the number of the faithful. Imagine—but no conception can reach the flashes of eloquence, the weight of argument, the worth of divine truth, which would flow from his apostolic lips. The subject of his discourse was that which reaches the condition of us all—he spake “*concerning the faith of Christ.*” This was the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, of his preaching. But in preaching that faith, he ranged through all the transgressions to which his auditors were ob-

noxious. He *reasoned* with all the fire of truth, with all the ardour of inspiration itself, on topics, at once interesting and awful; "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come;" *righteousness*, that is, the administration of true, pure, and substantial justice; and *temperance*, that is, true, pure, and immaculate chastity; and these, under the tremendous sanction of a *judgment to come*. Knowing *who were present*, as each word drops from the Apostle, and presents itself to our ears, we shrink with sympathetic fears. *Felix trembled*. Had he not trembled, the power of conscience must have been dead in him; and if he *did* tremble *without conversion*, who, my brethren, would change conditions with Felix?

But see! at this interesting moment, his wife Drusilla, partaker at least of the second count in this indictment, sits unmoved. We know *who she was*, and *what she had done*. Does she express no variation of countenance, no unusual tremor, no impatience at the bold words of the imprisoned preacher? Does she find an open and unrepented adultery so easy a burthen, as to have no apprehensions of that *future day* of which Paul spake? no suggestions that some consequences, though perhaps not so clearly seen, would follow? None. That vanity which had been her snare, turned aside the sting which should have darted into her breast. She was a Jewess too; she had been instructed in the law of the great Jehovah. So zealous had she been for her religion, as to make the profession of it an indispensable obligation of

the person she took to be her husband ; and then—so *consistent* is human nature—she renounced her ancient faith to associate with an infidel.

Here, indeed, some part of Drusilla's character may come home to our bosoms. We have, like her, been instructed in a pure faith—with this difference, that the faith which we profess, is in every respect clearer and more perspicuous, both in its evidence, and its motives, than Drusilla's. We have had the Gospel spread before us both with internal, and external, testimony ; with every solid and substantial proof of its influence on the good man's heart, and with the help of wise and learned expositors. We profess also to have received the great truths which have been delivered to us, and live in a land of Christians—Christians *like ourselves*. We find no novelty in what we hear, and therefore bestow upon it only customary attention. We abstain from the commission of flagitious sins, and are satisfied with our conduct. Less offences (for we can refine the *value* of crimes) we pass over as slight transgressions ; or if we are sometimes guilty of what we allow to be faults, we forge arguments in our favour, from the unbounded mercy and forbearance of our Creator, and continue as unmoved as the wife of Felix ; or, as the adulterous woman in the book of Proverbs, who “ eateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness¹.”

Beware then, my Christian brethren, of a care-

¹ Prov. xxx. 20.

less and insensible, of an hardened and obdurate heart. There is always danger in a wound which is not felt. “If we say that we have *no* sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us¹.” Our blessed Saviour gave this reproof to the chief priests and elders, whose knowledge of the law of Moses no one will dispute, but whose practice every one must condemn—“Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you².” It is easier to convince a notorious offender of his guilt, and change his heart to the true, faithful, and legitimate obedience of the Gospel, than to make any impression upon those, who imagine themselves so wise, so innocent, so good, and so religious, as neither to need the ministration of the word, nor the influence and sanctifying graces of God’s Holy Spirit.

If there be a serious caution, which I would inculcate upon this audience more than any other, *it is this*. To be *dead in sin* is an awful, and a dangerous state. Prove, therefore, the sincerity of your love of Christ, by a careful and unprejudiced examination of your hearts. “Examine yourselves whether ye be *in the faith*—prove your own selves³.” Be not satisfied with your first reflections; neither with *well-meant* consolations of your friends. Both are frequently deceitful; and you will be aware of the peril of placing your salvation on the hazard of so treacherous a die.

But though there are some who, like this Jewess,

¹ 1 John i. 8.

² Matt. xxi. 31.

³ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

can hear, with unmoved countenances and unflattered hearts, the searching doctrines of the Gospel, there are others, like her husband, who *tremble*, yet recover; who start to think that the particular subject of discussion may be applied to them, yet rally the displeasing thought, and become as hard, yea harder, than before. These are they of whom the Apostle speaks, who, “do not like to retain God in their knowledge, and therefore God gives them over to a reprobate mind¹.” Dreadful consideration!—But what can *they* reply, who wilfully “resist the truth²,” and “do despite unto the Spirit of grace³?”

It is a comfortable reflection, however, how frequently the blessing of God attends the preaching of *the word*. The minister may not indeed behold the immediate effect of the good seed which he sows. But if it do not fall into an ungrateful soil, and perish, he may reasonably expect from the promises of God, that, like the natural harvest, it will “spring and grow up he knoweth not how, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear⁴.” In few examples, the impression of a converted heart is instantaneous; but in many, and many, a blessed case, there is as perceptible an increase of *the life of God in the soul of man*, as there is in the natural growth and maturity of a plant; I do not mean, that perfection is any attribute of our mortal state. In the full intent of the

¹ Rom. i. 28.

² 2 Tim. iii. 8.

³ Heb. x. 29.

⁴ Mark iv. 27.

expression the comparison fails. But every serious Christian knows, that the longer he lives under the influence and direction of the Gospel, the greater proficiency he makes in religion, the more he continues to “*grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ¹.”

Unhappily this was not the case with Felix. It is no sooner recorded that he trembled at the Apostle's preaching, than it is said that he hurried to put an end to the conference. “Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” A convenient season! What season can be more convenient than the present? for death, and a thousand difficulties and inconveniences, stand between us, and that which is to come. We find, indeed, that the governor frequently communed with the Apostle, doubtless on subjects of a similar nature; and yet this *convenient season* for apprehending the great truths of Christianity, and modelling his conduct by a pure faith, never arrived. Alas! sinner, this is thy case! Thou art no stranger to the historical faith of the Gospel, and yet, vital Christianity, such as moves the affections, and improves the heart, never operates towards thy conversion. The reason why Felix so often conversed with Paul, may be thy case also. It was interested, and venal. “He hoped that *money* should have been given him.” Base love of riches tempted *him*, and beware thou, lest a covetous or parsimonious disposition tempt *thee* to depart from

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 18.

the unerring rectitude of moral conduct. Beware also lest some other motive, equally base, and equally treacherous, may produce the same effect; for danger lurks where vice flatters, and virtue sinks in the same proportion that religious principle decays.

But be not led by the example of those who save appearances at the expense of their integrity. Felix durst not listen to St. Paul; and therefore put him off by a flattering, time-serving apology. "Let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous¹." Our Christianity must be radically just, pure, consistent, and sincere, to give us a well-grounded hope that it will be successful. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin²."

After all that had passed between Felix and our venerable Apostle, it might have been expected that good-will, at least, should have induced him to set him at liberty, when he found that no bribe could be procured, and that justice could not condemn him. No. He had other masters to please. "For after two years," (so long did this intercourse continue) Porcius Festus was sent to take the government, and "Felix, *willing to shew the Jews a pleasure*, left Paul bound." In this case also his

¹ 1 John iii. 7.

² Ibid. i. 6, 7.

pleasure was his interest. He wished to conciliate the people of his province; for his rapacity, and venality, followed him to Rome, where he must have met with his deserts, but for the interposition of his brother Pallas, a favourite of the Emperor Nero, and the silence of those over whom he had so unworthily presided. Thus Paul's captivity became itself the bribe, as his blessed Master's had been before, to appease the cruel and unprovoked indignation of the Jewish people; and thus ended the procuratorship of Felix.

There is much matter for reflection in the different subjects of this Lecture, which, I trust, none of us will be willing to *put off* to a more *convenient season*. As I have endeavoured to select the most prominent parts for our contemplation, may God's grace draw them nearer to our hearts, that we may call for them, not at some distant period, but *now*, when we most want them, in our houses, and in our chambers, in the midst of our families, and in our private retirements! Let us be guarded by religion's *better part*, that we may hear the voice of God's ministers reasoning concerning the faith of Christ, and reproving those "sins, which most easily beset us," without feeling the severe *tremors* of Felix, or continuing in the *callous apathy* of Drusilla.

LECTURE XXV.

ACTS XXV. XXV.

St. Paul's Defence before Festus, and Appeal to Cæsar—Characters of Agrippa and Bernice—His Defence before Agrippa.—Cæsarea. A. D. 62.

WHEN we accompany the narrative of a good man's life with suitable reflections on the various incidents of it as they occur, how sweetly do the hours of reading pass, and how delightful are the impressions left upon the mind ! During the repetition of those scenes which he spent in ease and tranquillity, what sympathetic calmness rests upon our breasts ! When we follow his steps in the moments of difficulty and danger, we partake of the perplexity of his situation ; and when this is heightened into actual, or approaching sufferings, that happiness which the mind experienced, is changed into uneasy apprehensions, and we forget that we are only spectators. Some feelings of this nature, and those not faint, attend the perusal of St. Paul's travels : with this additional interest, that our own comfort, our own happiness, our own *salvation*, is connected

with the holy doctrines for which he became a martyr.

Two years of the Apostle's valuable life were spent in that kind of imprisonment at Cæsarea, which we have described; at the end of which time, a new Governor appears. New expectations consequently arise, and new disappointments follow. We do not indeed find the character of the new Governor base and venal like his predecessor, but the state of the country over which he came to preside was miserable in the extreme, and exhibited a melancholy picture of rapacity and mismanagement. "When Festus came to Judæa," says the Historian of the Jews, "he found all in desolation and distress; the country laid waste; the people driven from their habitations; their houses exposed to fire and pillage, and themselves at the mercy of a brutal and ferocious multitude¹." To this description of the country, he adds a most uncomfortable account of the High Priest, and leaders of the Jews, at this period; an account which considerably illustrates St. Luke's history, and renders, in all respects, credible, their persecution of the venerable Apostle, and their intention privately to destroy *him* whom they could not publicly condemn. Immediately after the arrival of Festus in his province, he went up to Jerusalem. The first request that was made him, was to order the prisoner Paul, whose case the Sanhedrim laid before him, to be brought to Jerusalem; by no

¹ Jos. Hist. B. 20. c. 7.

means for the sake of public justice, but to gratify their private revenge, as they intended to “lay wait in the way to kill him.” What! could not time, which softens every injury, which meliorates even the worst perversions of reason, could not time subdue the warm resentments of the Jewish leaders? No. They still, at the end of two years, pursued their iniquitous design. The pure religion which he taught was incompatible with their conduct, and *therefore* they could not forgive him. This, my Brethren, melancholy as the prospect is, this is human nature.

How wonderfully did Providence over-rule the mind of Festus on this occasion! Had he complied, as a new Governor, who was asked a favour, very innocently might, the labours of Paul might here have ended by his assassination. The base designs of man were frustrated by the invisible interposition of the finger of God. Festus, with more prudence, and, I would hope, with more integrity, declined the request; and, for the purposes of equitable judgment, recommended his accusers to bring their charge, if they had any *real* charge against him, which he seemed to doubt, before him at Cæsarea, to which place he meant shortly to return.

The very next day after his arrival at the seat of his government, so expeditious is real justice, he took his place upon the judgement-seat, and patiently investigated the cause, which was now fairly brought before him.

We need not go over again the same ground

which we considered in the last Lecture. The charges were substantially the same, though heightened with several aggravations; for it is said that they now laid *many and grievous complaints* against him, which yet, it seems, *they could not prove*. The Apostle answers with his usual perspicuity. From a part of his defence it would appear, as if they now rested the merit of their cause chiefly upon the charge of sedition, as coming nearer to a breach of the Roman laws, and most likely to be punished by a Roman Governor. Hence, probably, the Apostle introduces the name of the Emperor, and hence might arise the suggestion of appealing to the throne itself for redress. “Neither against the Jews, neither against the temple, *nor yet against Cæsar*, have I offended any thing at all.” The Governor, however, willing to do justice, was willing also, if he could do so by the acquiescence of the prisoner, to oblige the Sanhedrim; and therefore proposes to him the removal of his cause to Jerusalem, where he would himself attend to prevent unfair proceedings. But Paul, whose character never sinks on an emergency, rejects the insinuating proposal, and boldly pleads that privilege, which in every free government is an invaluable possession, the privilege of a personal application to the source, and well-spring of Justice. “Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar’s judgement-seat, where, as a Citizen of Rome, I have a legal right to be heard; and am willing to abide by the decision of the Court. To the Jews, as thou knowest, I have done no wrong. I have not broken

any Jewish law. And if I have transgressed the Roman law, which I deny, let me be judged by that law, and suffer all its penalties, even the penalty of death. But if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man, I speak peremptorily as an injured citizen, no man may deliver me unto them. *I appeal unto CÆSAR.*"

Who does not admire the noble, and indignant spirit of the Apostle? Not persecution or oppression, not two years' imprisonment in chains, not the presence of the Governor, nor the frowns and menaces of his inveterate enemies, could damp his ardour. There is no disrespect whatever in his manner; but feeling the sterling value of his own character, he expresses the warm and honest integrity of his heart.

It is likely the discerning Governor perceived the intrepid character of his prisoner, and therefore found no difficulty in allowing his appeal. He withdrew for the purpose of consulting the Council, which all Governors were permitted to have; and rejoicing, probably, to be freed from so troublesome a prosecution, he acquiesced in Paul's demand.—“Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? Unto Cæsar thou shalt go.”

This is another of those wonderful turns which we have had so frequent occasion to remark, by which the ways of a particular Providence have been made manifest to men. While the Apostle was confined in the Castle of Antonia, he was comforted by an heavenly vision, which assured him of his personal safety, and acquainted him that, at no

very distant period, he must bear the same testimony of his Divine Master at Rome, which he had so lately done at Jerusalem. A presumptuous man, under such an assurance, would have hastily made use of the means of deliverance which were put into his hands. But how does Paul acquit himself? He, piously and devoutly, waits for the leading of the divine Angel of the Covenant. He never *forces* an event, but accepts the superintendence which Providence lays before him. Some motive is brought forward to direct, some secret influence to induce him to act according to those principles which so wholly occupied his mind. This too is the leading star which every man should follow in all the occurrences of his life. If we watch diligently, we shall find that there are moments in every man's life, when divine Providence is working for his good. No moment indeed is without this controuling influence ; but a particular inspection of outward circumstances, and inward dispositions, will clearly point out that there is an hinge on which all our happiness and all our misery turn ; that, in many instances, something more than common judgment influences our determinations ; and what can that be, but the power and direction of Him, who ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth ?

We may remark that the Emperor to whom the Apostle appealed, was Nero, a man of savage cruelty, and base degeneracy of character. In the former part of his reign, indeed, when this circumstance occurred, he had not arrived at the height of his

iniquity ; but enough perhaps was known by the Apostle to have prevented such an application, had not the declared intention of Heaven prompted him to have used these means of extending the knowledge of the Gospel, and planting the cross of Christ even in the midst of *Cæsar's household*. Besides, St. Paul was too well acquainted with his duty to God, to neglect all lawful obedience to his prince. He could say “the powers that be, are ordained of God¹,” even when those powers were exercising all kinds of wickedness ; not that the Apostle approved, or countenanced, immoral conduct in an Emperor, any more than in a subject ; but finding such powers in the seat of government, he had every reason to suppose that some wise purpose of Providence, either of correction or of punishment, in themselves or others, was designed by it. “Wherefore,” he says, “we must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake².”

We have now two other characters to introduce, whose names indeed are known in history ; but, I fear, not much to their honour and credit. Among those who came to congratulate Festus on his arrival in his government, were Agrippa and Bernice, brother and sister of Drusilla ; all of whom were children of Herod, whose memorable death is recorded in this history. Alas ! that one family, and that well instructed, as it should seem, in the ancient and sacred religion of the Jews, should be more

¹ Rom. xiii. 1.

² Rom. xiii. 5.

noted for their iniquity, than even for their rank ! Bernice, we are told, after becoming the widow of her uncle Herod, King of Chalcis, an union, not likely to be attended with happy consequences, attached herself to her brother, Agrippa, who succeeded him in his kingdom. The too just censure of the world, with respect to this connection, induced her to marry Polemon, King of Cilicia, which marriage, for similar reasons, was as quickly dissolved ; and many years afterwards we find her resident with Agrippa at Rome, a deserved object of severity to the celebrated Roman Satirist¹.

Agrippa had not been long at Cæsarea before Festus made him acquainted with all the circumstances of Paul's situation. The name of Paul was, probably, no novelty to him, whose father had murdered James, and imprisoned Peter. And being a Jew, both by birth and education, the governor thought his opinion might be useful ; as the accusation of the prisoner did not appear to be a matter of common law, or even of civil discussion, but to consist of certain intricate *questions of their own superstition*, as he calls the Jewish faith, (probably in a softer sense than we should use the expression) and of " one Jesus who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." Not thinking himself competent to decide on such subjects, he informs the King that he had not opposed the prisoner's appeal. " Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him."

¹ Juv. Sat. 6. l. 154.

The appointed day soon arrived, which proved a day of much triumph to St. Paul; and confirmed his character, not only as a man of pure and glowing eloquence, but as a bold and intrepid Apostle. It was here, or in such “thoughts that breathe, and words that burn¹,” as he displayed here, that *Paul of Tarsus* won the applause of the celebrated Grecian critic², and produced arguments, illustrations, and proofs, strong as language supported by facts could make them, for the truth of that revelation whereby *we, and all our houses, must be saved*.

The Court was opened with more than usual splendour. Agrippa and Bernice entered with great pomp, followed by a long train of royal attendants, surrounded by a display of all the military and civil officers, as well as the principal persons of the city of Cæsarea. This was an audience, as to rank and abilities, well worthy of the Apostle. God also gave him “a mouth and wisdom;” and yet, we do not know, that on this occasion he made one convert. Shame on their hardened and impenitent hearts! But thus is the will of God; not that they should continue hardened and impenitent, but that, as the wise and the noble resisted the introduction of his Gospel, he would turn to the babes and sucklings, who should perfect his praise.

At the command of Festus, Paul was brought forth; Paul, the prisoner, humbler in his attire, humbler in himself, and bearing the chain which was his glory. This was no new scene to him, and

¹ Gray.

² Longini. Frag.

could not, for a moment, interrupt the firmness and tranquillity of his mind. With the prospect of such days as these, he had said, "I am ready not to be bound only, but to die for the name of the Lord Jesus."

The talents, as well as character, of Festus, make a favourable appearance on this occasion. He opens the Assembly with an address, elegant and courteous. He pays proper deference to the opinion of Agrippa, and is respectful to the venerable prisoner. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself."—The Apostle, then stretching forth his hand in a natural and graceful attitude which requests attention, answered for himself, in language which has been constantly admired ever since it was spoken. St. Paul's personal address to Agrippa, is extremely happy and impressive. As he was an elegant scholar and a Jew, the Apostle had reason to expect at least a fair and candid hearing; and to hope that he might make a friend, if not a convert, of his judge. "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews. Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews; wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently." He then begins a plain and honest narrative of his life and character, referring for evidence of its truth, to the Jews themselves. That his principles had been those of the Pharisees he acknowledges here, as he had done before; but he rests chiefly

on that part of their belief, which respects a resurrection of the dead :—“ And now,” says he, “ I stand and am judged ;” that is, I stand arraigned for a declaration of the hope of the promise of God unto our fathers, unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come : this is *their* warm, *their* consoling expectation. Why then should I be singled out as holding unsound or heretical doctrines : for it is on account of “ *this hope*, King Agrippa, that I am accused of the Jews.”—“ Why should it be thought a thing incredible with *you*, that God should raise the dead ?” We cannot sufficiently admire the eloquence or the force of this sudden transition to the belief of Agrippa. He was an observer of the Mosaic law ; and, according to his own principles, *ought* to believe the *possibility* of a resurrection of the dead ; and if he conceded this, as a *general* argument, St. Paul was ready to press the conclusion. Why then do you make any difficulty in crediting a *particular* instance of the power of the Almighty ?

It might be thought unnecessary to make a further reflection on this important question, which implies its own answer. But these days, my Brethren, have brought new wonders among us ; the people of a neighbouring nation, who, at no distant period, even superstitiously regarded the dead, and spent large fortunes in incense and mercenary prayers for their deliverance from an imaginary state of temporary punishment, inscribed their temples with a declaration, which even a Socrates or a Cicero would have beheld with horror, that *death*

was an eternal sleep. But let us consider how far the argument taken from *natural reason* will carry us. To raise the dead is confessedly above the power of nature, but it is not above the power of the God of nature; for he who made the world, must be able to do all things, far above the power of any thing that he has made. “He then, as a learned Divine remarks, that can do the greater, can undoubtedly do the less; he that made all things out of nothing, can much more raise a body out of the dust; he who at first gave life to so many inanimate beings, can restore that which is dead to life again. It is an excellent saying of one of the Jewish teachers, ‘That he who made that which was not, *to be*, can certainly make that which once was, *to be again*.’ This has at once the force of a demonstration; for no man that believes that God has done the one, can make any doubt but that he can, if he please, do the other¹.” Had the French philosophers reasoned thus, they might have saved the world from the misery of at least one revolution; and if any of the same school are to be found among ourselves, I would direct them to the same *natural* argument for a solution of their doubts; and this, I trust, would soon bring them, by God’s blessing, to a belief of that *revealed hope*, the result of sound inquiry, and a good understanding. “Why indeed should it be thought a thing incredible, or impossible, that God should raise the dead?”—and if neither incredible, nor impossible,

¹ Tillotson, Serm. 194.

why might he not raise *Jesus* from the dead, as authentic witnesses and authentic history have declared; and if *Jesus was* raised from the dead, under the circumstances there described, *his religion must be true*; and, by faith in Him, must the whole world be saved.

Returning from this short digression, the Apostle resumes the history of himself, and acquaints his noble auditors with the remarkable circumstances of his conversion. He does not spare his own impetuosity of temper, and misguided judgment. He repeats the account of his severe persecution of the believers in Christ; at a time too when he could have no conception that he could be stopped by any means, human or divine, in the midst of his career. Yet he *was* stopped; not by any visionary flight arising from himself, not by any argument which the unhappy persons he was tormenting, could make use of to convince him of his error; but by the miraculous interposition, at *midday, on the public road to Damascus*, and *in the company of other travellers*, of that divine Person whose cause he was endeavouring to suppress, and whose disciples it was his delight to persecute and destroy. This alteration of sentiment and conduct, without any outward inducement for that purpose, is an argument of sincerity which he would here press upon his hearers. He was *called*—called by a divine voice, beckoned by a celestial hand, summoned by a superior power, to be a *minister* of a new religion, and an incorruptible *witness* of its truth. “Arise,” said that Jesus whom Paul perse-

cuted; “ Arise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee *for this purpose*, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee.”—Then follows the great and important commission on which he was to act; a commission which announces the *whole design of Christianity*; which is, therefore, derived to us from the most undoubted authority, and through the most unadulterated channel. I send thee, said our ever-blessed Master, in words which every Minister should carefully attend to, and every private Christian write in the inmost tablet of his heart—I send thee to “ open the eyes of the *spiritually* blind, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in *Me*.”

Clearly to understand the change which is here intended by the Gospel, we ought not only to take into consideration the general state of the world, previous to the establishment of Christianity, but the actual corrupt state of unregenerated man. The full delineation of this inquiry is too extensive for our present discussion; but it would be much for our benefit, if we would examine ourselves on the important and radical change, which is required in the heart and affections of the true converts of the Gospel. That new features have appeared upon the globe since the light of the Gospel dis-

played its heavenly beams, is manifest to every one the least acquainted with ancient history ; and that the heart of the unconverted is still obnoxious to all the evil consequences of sin, is equally manifest, and greatly to be deplored. How deeply should this reflection dwell upon our thoughts ! Satisfied that our hearts are not wholly purified from many and great corruptions, that we are guilty of actual transgressions, as well as of many omissions of our duty, we cannot but know, from common sense and plain reason, that we are liable to punishment, and that punishment must follow, if nothing occur to prevent it. Remaining under this sentence, how happy should we be to find any symptom of divine mercy and forgiveness. This we have assured to us by the glad tidings of revelation. Convinced of the truth of this, new prospects of comfort arise before us. A path of redemption from the penalty of sin, is pointed out ; and all that is required of us to be made partakers of this great benefit, is to *believe, that we may be saved*. *Belief*, such as is here demanded, comprehends the whole of Christian edification. The Saviour's merits lead the way to all those who would profit by the Saviour's example. By this true belief is such an alteration effected in the heart, as no other age, no other remedy could supply. It is indeed *opening the eyes of the blind, and turning them from darkness to light*, a cheering and delightful change ! But it is even more than this ; it is rescuing them from the power and dominion of the Prince of Darkness, that great enemy of man ; it

is breaking from the greatest spiritual thralldom, by which they have been long *tied and bound by the chain of their sins*; it is putting them into a state in which they are capable of receiving forgiveness, capable of salvation itself; and promoted to the *inheritance of those who are sanctified*, to use our Lord's own expression, by *faith that is in Him*.

The efficacy of this doctrine, in producing the great and salutary end of reformation, has been conspicuous wherever it has been firmly established; and wherever it shall be firmly established, it will, by God's grace, continue to produce the same beneficial effects to the end of the world. Happy will it be for us, when we are brought in review before the judgment-seat of Christ, if it appear that this great change had taken place in our souls; if it should be said of us, as of the Corinthians of old—"Such *were* some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God¹." The Gospel is capable of all this; and if we are not more in love with our sins than with our Saviour, the power of divine grace will rescue us from a state of danger and of death, and restore us to one of perfect safety and security, in those regions where neither sin, Satan, nor any thing unclean, can enter.

These tidings of great joy, thus miraculously communicated to the Apostle, the Apostle gladly accepted. "Whereupon," he says, "O King

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.

Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," but pursued the track so clearly pointed out by the inspiration of the Almighty ; and first at Damascus, where my conversion was completed, then at Jerusalem, and in all the coasts of Judæa, and afterwards to the idolatrous Gentiles, I preached the heavenly doctrines, which I was thus commissioned to deliver ; and in particular, that they should "repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance;" works, which naturally spring from such an holy source. The invaluable doctrine of forgiveness of sins through Christ, and the correspondent conduct required of every convert, was the sum of my preaching. And this is the great offence I have given ; this was the cause of my arrest in the temple ; it is for this that the Jews desire to take away my life. But God hath preserved me to this day, to bear no other testimony but that which Moses and the Prophets bore long ago, when they foretold the suffering and death of Christ, and that a belief of his resurrection should be the happy signal of salvation both to Jew and Gentile."

The governor, Festus, we may imagine, had been an attentive hearer of this eloquent discourse. But he was an heathen, and had no previous conception of a resurrection of the dead. Some of the ancient philosophers, indeed, had a faint notion that the soul might survive the body, and appear again in another state, but that the body should be raised, after every particle of it had been dissipated by death, I know not that one of them

imagined. When the Apostle arrived at this part of his argument, Festus could no longer restrain himself, but called to him in a loud and authoritative voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Such a doctrine as this no man ever heard, nor can any reasonable man believe. How calmly does the good Apostle answer this interruption!—"I am not mad, *most noble* Festus"—he even addresses him with the title his situation demanded; an example of deference to superior rank; unlike the rude and uncourteous appellations of modern disciples of equality. "I am not mad, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." How often is it necessary for those who oppose the extravagant opinions of a licentious world, to adopt the reply of Paul! Every opprobrious name is directed against the wise reprovcr, or discreet instructor of his brethren—"the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad¹." To this he can only answer, "I am not mad;" but propose, for your serious consideration, arguments of sobriety and truth.

From Festus, whose infidelity was inveterate, the Apostle turns to Agrippa with an animated address, presuming that he, who must have been well informed in Sacred History, could have no difficulty in acquitting him from the charge of insanity. But I will not injure this truly interesting conversation with any comment.—"But Paul said, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak

¹ Hos. ix. 7.

forth the words of truth and soberness. For the King knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.—King Agrippa! believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am:—Then most emphatically holding up his chains, he adds, “*Except these bonds.*” The alacrity, the abrupt but emphatic question, and the pathetic apostrophe, are marks of true eloquence, which captivate the mind, and are best calculated to persuade.

That this strong impression was not fully competent to the conversion of Agrippa, that he did not become at once an entire convert to Christianity, can only be attributed to those Jewish prejudices and vicious inclinations, which blinded his eyes, and hardened his heart.

The wonder too will cease if we examine our own breasts, and consider how long *we* have stood out against the clearest evidences of Christian truth. In the writings of the Evangelists, we daily hear the words of Christ himself, we see his miracles, and receive his doctrines. In the very book which we have so long studied, as the foundation of these Lectures, his divine mission is authenticated by every species of testimony; and particularly by the wonderful effusion and super-

natural gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are satisfied too, that the ordinary influences of the Divine Spirit are promised to every individual of the Church of Christ, to the end of the world. And yet—let me ask—are we *almost*, or *altogether* Christians? The silence of our hearts confirms our reproof; and leaves us only to pray, while we admire the warm and pious wish of the venerable Paul, that we may, both in sound faith and active virtue, be not only *almost*, but *altogether such as he was*.

This interesting dialogue put an end to the assembly; and probably would have liberated Paul if he had not first made his appeal to a superior tribunal. When they had considered his case, “Agrippa said unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.” It was then no longer in the power of the Governor to pronounce a decisive judgment.

Before we dismiss from our minds the consideration of the Apostle’s eloquent address, let us reflect on the advantages we enjoy as Christians, in having such models before our eyes. We talk of the eloquence of many eminent ancient orators, and justly praise the perspicuity, elegance, and energy of their discourses; but which of them, my brethren, had such a topic as St. Paul, or could lead an audience as he did, on this, and perhaps with more effect, on some other occasions? Let it be no apology for our lukewarmness, or our indolence of mind, that we have not witnessed the eloquence of such distinguished orators.

Our Christian doctrines are of a more elevated nature than all the moral effusions, or political discussions, that classical history can afford. Our duties, too, are offered on much superior motives. Let it then be with us, as it was with *him*, that was called upon to second a long and florid speech on some great and popular occasion, who merely added, “*All that he hath spoken, I will do.*”

LECTURE XXVI.

ACTS XXVII.

St. Paul's Voyage towards Rome, and Shipwreck.—Cæsarea—Sidon—Myra—Fair Havens—Melita. A.D. 62.

It is not easy to appreciate, in language suitable to the occasion, the holy labours of St. Paul. The longer we continue his companions by an attentive perusal of the narrative of his friend and fellow-labourer St. Luke, the more sensible are we of the energy of that divine Spirit which influenced his actions, and of the importance of that cause, which led him from the shores of Palestine to Rome, then mistress of the world.

During the many days which we have thus spent together, have we been able to discover one, in which he was not warmly interested in his Master's service? No sooner does he complete one Apostolic journey, than he is ready, with the sun, to set forward upon the next day's engagement. No personal suffering made any impression on his duty; unless it were to incite him to new exertions, from the consideration of the person *for whom* he

suffered. Whether “in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren¹ ;” in most, or all of which situations, we have, or shall behold him, he was still the same pious, faithful, and intrepid Apostle. To whom, O Paul, mayest thou be compared? Many eminent and excellent men have passed in review before us, *in the glorious company of the Apostles, and in the noble army of martyrs*, but none, whom even sacred history has recorded, surpasses thee, in the soundness of thy faith, or in the magnitude of thy gifts, graces, and Apostolic virtues. Thou wert indeed a *chosen vessel*, and well didst thou fulfil the grateful task allotted thee. When that “great multitude, which no man can number shall stand before the throne of the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands²,” then, and not till then, shall thy triumph be complete; for thou shalt see *Him* sitting upon the throne, who did call thee on the road to Damascus; and thou shalt say, (presenting before him thy offspring in the faith) “Behold, I, and the children whom God hath given me³.”

How delightful to every minister of Christ, to copy after so exquisite a model! How sweet the hours of every disciple of the Gospel, which are spent in the study of St. Paul’s writings! writings springing from the heart, eloquent and powerful,

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 26.² Rev. vii. 9.³ Heb. ii. 13.

and, like the breast of his blessed Master, *full of grace and truth!*

How many weary journeys did St. Paul take in the provinces of Asia, and in the eastern parts of Europe! How frequently did he coast along their dangerous shores, and cross their narrow seas! "Thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep¹." This he could say to the Corinthians a few years before that period of his history, at which we have now arrived. But none of these things dismayed, or intimidated him; he was ready to brave new dangers, to encounter new shipwrecks, in the diffusion of those truths, which he was called upon to sustain.

The moment was not distant when this was to be the case. After having attended the Apostle through many interesting scenes by land, we are now to accompany him by sea, where we shall still find him in possession of the same indiscriminate integrity of character. Indeed, as the incidents of the voyage placed him in a new situation, they called forth a new display of those superior talents, those commanding abilities, which we have so frequently had occasion to admire. Himself, an almost deserted prisoner, sent in chains from a distant province, to be tried for a criminal offence; shut up in an inconvenient vessel, with many more in similar circumstances of distress, heightened, probably, by the aggravation of guilt; controuled by an officer of government; and ex-

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 25.

pecting, perhaps, an unmerited punishment ; yet even under these unpromising appearances, his native dignity, his native virtue, commands respect ; but above all, those endowments of the Spirit which he carried out with him, and which not only did not desert him, but were improved by every exigence of his situation, gave him a superiority which no outward circumstances could depress. The good man, indeed, is never degraded by the mere symptom of external distress. His mind is superior to his fortune ; and it is that which gives weight, dignity, and interest, to the lowest condition ; whilst the highest, unless elevated by intrinsic goodness of character, will in vain boast of its distinctions.

In consequence of Paul's appeal to Cæsar, the governor soon found an opportunity of sending him to Rome, and placed him, with other prisoners, under the care of Julius, a Roman centurion, who commanded a legion, distinguished by the celebrated name of *Augustus*. With him, they embarked on board a vessel belonging to Adramyttium, a sea-port of the province of Mysia, in Asia Minor ; along the coast of which they intended to sail for the purposes of trade. Even in this situation, the providence of God did not leave Paul without the consolation of friends. His faithful historian Luke, and Aristarchus, the Macedonian, who had before been his companion, and was afterwards a considerable assistant to him at Rome, and at last a partaker of his bonds, embarked in the same ship with him. We are the less solicitous

for the Apostle's personal comfort, when we find him accompanied with such real friends. Happy is the man, in the voyage of human life, whose cares are consoled, and whose troubles are softened, by the warm affection of a friend ; but above all, of a *religious friend* ; for when those storms arise, which must always be expected in that tumultuous element, he can kindly assist in smoothing that billow which he cannot remove ; and in pointing to *Him* whom both the winds, and the sea obey.

On the day after they left Cæsarea, they reached Sidon, a very ancient port of Phœnicia, in the neighbourhood of which, our Saviour himself had preached. Here the Apostle, by the courtesy of Julius, who must have received a favourable impression of him from Festus and Agrippa, was permitted to visit his Christian brethren, and to accept the expressions of their kindness. After leaving Sidon, the wind being contrary, instead of holding a straight course, they were obliged to sail under Cyprus, that is, between the island and the main land of Cilicia ; and then, along the coast of Pamphilia to Myra, a city of Lycia.

This may be considered as the first station of the voyage ; and hitherto every thing had been successful. But the vessel in which they had embarked, no longer suited their purpose, and the centurion, finding at this port a ship belonging to Alexandria, the metropolis of Egypt, laden with corn, and other goods for Italy, he made a new engagement for those under his protection, and sent

them on board. From hence the ship made but a slow progress, on account of unfavourable winds; for after sailing many days, they hardly approached Cnidus, a city of Caria, opposite the island of Coos. Thence sailing under Crete (now Candia) they passed Salmone, the eastern promontory of the island, and soon after came to a place called Fair Havens, nigh whereunto was the city of *Lasea*. This city is the only place in St. Paul's voyage not mentioned by some ancient geographer. It has been reasonably conjectured, that this was one of the cities of ancient Crete, which are well known to have been destroyed, or fallen to decay; indeed the expression of St. Luke may be thus interpreted—"near whereunto *was*, that is, had been, the city of *Lasea*¹."

It began now to appear, that the voyage had been commenced at an unpropitious season of the year, when the nights were growing long and dark, and stormy weather was approaching. This is particularly marked by the mention of *the Fast*, namely, "the fast of the expiation (which was held in the month of September) being already past;" of course, the boisterous month of October must have now been far advanced. St. Paul, aware of these circumstances, probably by the interposition of a vision, cautioned them against the fatal consequences which might ensue both to the cargo and the passengers, if they left their present place of security. But the admonition was disregarded.

¹ Biscoe, p. 379.

“ The centurion believed the master, and owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.”

Temporal safety ought not to be beneath the consideration of spiritual men. We were born to live in a material world, and material things were given us for our comfort, and support in it. Life is a great and inestimable benefit ; not merely as it *is in itself*, but as it is one link in the chain of an immortal state of existence. It is not indeed worth preserving at the expence of conscience, or at the hazard of eternal happiness ; but as it is the medium by which only we can attain a state of salvation, it is our duty to preserve it for so glorious a purpose. Besides, in working out our own salvation, we are not only to live for ourselves, but for others. No man can tell all the purposes *for which* he may be continued in being. The good man, though he may long with the Apostle to be “ *dissolved*” and *to be with Christ*, will not prematurely desert his station, for the reasons which the same Apostle gives his friends—“ nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more profitable for you ¹.”

A second observation arises from this remark of St. Luke. It was prudent, perhaps, for the centurion to attend to the opinion of the master and owner of the vessel, who might reasonably be expected to be best acquainted with their own profession. But had he permitted Paul to have opened his understanding, by instructing him in that *more*

¹ Phil. i. 24.

excellent way which he preached, and which I have no doubt he would endeavour to do; the danger which now threatened might have been entirely prevented, and one more centurion would have been added to the faith of the Gospel. But Julius was overborne by worldly prudence. He listened to the owner and the pilot, and rejected the salutary counsel of Paul. In circumstances of doubt and difficulty, we should always suspect the insinuations of worldly prejudice; we should weigh the matter in an even balance. But as human judgment may err, we should at the same time look up to *Him* who holdeth the scales, in holy confidence and devout supplication.

The port called Fair Havens, where they now were, not being thought commodious for a winter residence, the greater part of the passengers recommended a removal to Phœnice, another harbour of Crete, so situated, that the winds, at that season so dangerous, could do them no injury. A favourable breeze springing up from the south, altered the plan. They thought they had accomplished their purpose, and sailed close along the coast of Crete. But this did not continue long. The gale increased. There arose a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon, a Typhon¹ according to

¹ *Ανεμος τυφωνικος, ὁ καλουμενος Ευροκλυδων.* The learned and ingenious Mr. Bryant, in his dissertation of the wind Euroclydon, from the expression *beat upon the island*, imagines, that it had a reference to the situation of the person who speaks of it, who was at that time to the windward, or south of it. It is plain, therefore, he says, that the wind blew upon shore, and must have

the ancients ; a Tuffoon, as it is still called, or violent Levanter, as modern seamen term those winds in that part of the Mediterranean sea, called the Levant. The ship being rapidly carried forward by the violence of the tempest, and becoming unmanageable, they let her drive at the mercy of the winds and waves. But running under the island of Clauda, near the west end Crete, they took the opportunity of securing the sides of the vessel, by undergirding it, though they had much difficulty in hoisting out the boat for this purpose. When this was done, they continued their course with so much impetuosity, that they were afraid of being carried among the Syrtes, or quicksands of Africa, and therefore they lowered their sails, and so were driven, probably more moderately, before the wind. The tempest still continuing with unremitted violence, they endeavoured to ease the vessel by throwing overboard whatever they could spare ; and we find their wants lessening, as their danger increased. The second day after the storm com-

come from the south, or south-east. This, he adds, is fully warranted from the point where the ship was, and the direction it ran in afterwards, which was (according to his conjecture) towards the north and north-west. This observation is the foundation of his hypothesis, that the island Melita, where St. Paul was afterwards shipwrecked, was situated *in* the Adriatic sea, off the coast of Illyria, where there is an island at this day called Meleda, and certainly was *not* the present island known by the name of Malta. Mr. Bryant has undoubtedly produced very strong arguments in favour of his conjecture, but the writer is not so convinced by them, as to depart from the generally received opinion of the most celebrated commentators.

menced, they parted with some of their goods and merchandize ; on the third day, the furniture of the ship was cast into the sea ; and to shew with how much reluctance, and yet with how much readiness, they obeyed the voice of necessity, St. Luke says, “ We cast out *with our own hands* the tackling of the ship ;” a sacrifice, which nothing but a choice of evils could have induced them to make. Still the measure of their sufferings was not full. They had darkness, as well as tempest, to contend with. Neither sun nor stars for many days appeared. The hearts of the mariners sunk within them, and all hope or expectation of safety was totally at an end.

I will not here describe the different feelings and agitations of so many of our fellow-creatures in so perilous a situation. It is a scene which comes so home to us in every sea-port town, that the repetition of such distresses wound us in every nerve. But, my brethren, though I forbear to enter into particular circumstances in this place, I exhort, I beseech, such of you as “the waters have compassed about,” and have had “the weeds, as it were, wrapped about your heads¹ ;” to reflect on all you owe to that hand that rescued you, to that providential care which called you from the deep again. I cannot, however, resist the impulse of alluding to the wonderful preservation of a native of this town, with his ship’s company, and one of his Majesty’s vessels, who was wrecked not three

¹ Jonah ii. 5.

years ago, upon a coral reef, or sand-bank, 250 miles from the nearest land. Here, above eighty men remained, on such provisions and shelter as could be saved from one of the wreck, till this gallant mariner, with the commander of the King's ship, and twelve seamen, could traverse the ocean, about 750 miles, in a small boat, and return ; which they did in six weeks, and brought away from this situation, not to be thought of without horror, the whole number of their ship-wrecked companions ¹.

¹ Extract of a letter from Captain John Park, of the *Cato*, dated August 8, 1804 :—" I sailed from Port Jackson on the 10th of August, 1803, in company with his Majesty's ship *Porpoise*, and a merchant ship, *Bridgewater*. At a quarter before ten o'clock, on the night of the 17th, was wrecked, together with the *Porpoise*, on a coral reef never before seen, 250 miles from the nearest land. A few minutes after the *Cato* struck, she filled with water, and heeled off to the sea. We attempted to get out the boats, but the sea beating so violently upon her decks, drove them to pieces. I then ordered the masts to be cut away, and all hands took to the inner fore-chains, being the place most sheltered from the sea. In this situation we clung all night, straining our eyes after the *Bridgewater's* lights, confidently hoping the boats of that ship would come to our assistance in the morning. But in this hope we were disappointed. She appeared in sight the next morning, but putting conjecture for reality (as it appears by his account since published in the *India Gazette*) concluded we were all drowned, and proceeded in his voyage for India. However, the ways of Providence were manifestly directed to the preservation of the lives of the two crews, in the fortunate circumstance of the *Porpoise* taking the contrary way to the *Cato*, for had that ship heeled off from the reef as the *Cato* did, instead of inwards, every soul must inevitably have shared the common fate of death by starvation. But Providence having ordered it otherwise, we were able to save every thing belonging to her, though we lost

In a world which presents to us such casualties as these, what ought to be the state of mind which

all belonging to the Cato; and when day-light presented to our view the awful sight of the Cato's decks all blown up, and the greater part of the hull buried in the surf, we had at the same time the consolation to see the Porpoise entire, and her boats rowing about to leeward of the reef, but not able to come near us from the violence of the surf. At ten o'clock we were obliged to quit the Cato, and attempt to get through the surf upon broken pieces of the wreck. In which attempt, I am sorry to say, we lost G. P. and two others, who were washed off their planks, and drowned in the surf. The rest all landed safe, and joined the officers and crew of the Porpoise (upon a sand-bank, 250 yards long and 100 broad, about a quarter of a mile distant from the wreck (who humanely shared their cloaths and blankets with those of the Cato; and, after getting ashore some provisions and water, we all lay down to sleep with some little comfort, and, except a few of the Cato's men, who were bruised among the rocks, not a complaint was heard upon the bank. On the 22d of August (having given up all idea of seeing the Bridgewater more) it was determined that Captain Flinders, myself, and twelve men, should leave the wrecks for Port Jackson, in one of the Porpoise's boats, to procure a conveyance for our fellow-sufferers to some frequented port. It was accordingly put in force on the 26th, when we left the sand-bank, where we were living, with three weeks provisions, and with minds full of hope mixed with anxiety, returned three cheers, given by our ship-mates on the bank, who hauled down the ensign which was hoisted with the union as a signal of distress, and hoist in the upper canton; leaving behind water and provisions sufficient to last those on the bank, at full allowance, three months, amounting to eighty in number. After a passage of thirteen days, we arrived safe at Port Jackson, having travelled 750 miles in our little vessel. On the 20th of September, we left Port Jackson in the Rolla, and arrived at the wreck on the 7th of October; where we had the satisfaction of finding our ship-wrecked companions hearty and well, having been absent just six weeks. We lay at

every mortal should possess? The answer is obvious. It is not on the sea alone, that danger meets us in every breeze. The land has its perils too. And he who proudly says, "I will pull down my barns and build larger," is not farther from the inevitable *bourne*, than he who has but a plank between him and destruction. "What I say unto you, I say unto you all, Watch¹."

In the midst of this war of elements, "the sea and the waves roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear²," what a picture of serene piety and holy fortitude presents itself in the person of St. Paul! That sublime principle, which carried him through many trials, supports him still. His hope was firm, as it was founded upon his *faith*. The long continuance of the storm had prevented the ship's company from taking their ordinary food. After long abstinence, Paul *stood forth in the midst of them*, undismayed by the desolate appearance around him, the heavy winds which assailed him from every quarter, or the tremendous rolling and dashing of the waves. "Sirs! (said he) ye ought to have hearkened unto me, and not have left the safe harbour of Crete, and then you would not have combated this tempest, with the certain loss both of ship and cargo, as well as suffering an injury, both in fame and person, to yourselves. But distressed though we are at present, do not

the reef three days embarking the men and stores; when we set sail, and after a passage of seventy-four days, arrived safe at China." J. P.

¹ Mark xiii. 37.

² Luke xxi. 25.

give yourselves up to despair. There is a trust which ye know not. I have every reason to exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss, if you attend to me, of any man's life among you, but of the ship. I am, it is true, a prisoner, and have no command; but there is One, *whose I am, and whom I serve*, whom every element obeys. His heavenly messenger stood by me this night in a vision, and said, '*Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar, and lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*' These are good tidings, brethren; wherefore be of good cheer, and abide by the conditions, for I believe that it shall be, even as it was told me. This, however, must happen; it was also foretold that we must be shipwrecked upon a certain island."

In this speech of Paul, delivered under very peculiar circumstances, we are taught how far the providence of God interferes in the accomplishment of human purposes. We are not told that the storm was raised on account of Paul, or on account of any person in the ship. And yet many particular events were to be brought about by the means of it: a barbarous country was to be introduced to the first light of the Gospel; the lives of all those who sailed with the Apostle were to be preserved for his sake; and, for any thing that appears to the contrary, not only the lives, but the souls of many might be saved. Thus are the general laws of nature subservient to the influences of a particular providence. The winds may blow, and the waves roll. This is the original destina-

tion of the Creator. But the moral, as well as natural ends, to which they may be adapted, are instances of that superintending care, which every day, every hour, every moment, is extended over our heads. A firm belief of this, keeps alive the spirit of piety in our hearts. It tells us that we are never beyond the reach of Omnipotence; we are never out of the protection of One, who permits us, “through Him, who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope,” to call him *Father*—a word which no one can repeat, without bringing to his recollection every thing that is kind, forgiving, compassionate, and good. In what language does Paul describe Him? *Whose I am, and whom I serve!* Oh! that we could thus consider Him. We, God’s *property!* He, our life, and our support! This is indeed a connection which would *purify us, even as He is pure.* “Whose I am, and whom I serve.” That we may be *wholly* his, let us be assured, that “in Him *alone* we live, move, and have our being;” that “our life is hid with Christ in God;” and therefore we should pray, that “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with Him in glory¹.”

We may also infer from St. Paul’s language, that the acquisition, even of temporal benefits, frequently depends upon our faith in God. “I believe God that it shall be, even as it was told me.” The promises of God are sure. True piety requires this confidence; and it is thus expressed,

¹ Col. iii. 4.

to shew, that if a firm belief in God tends to secure temporal blessings, which are at best but of a secondary consideration, how much more surely does it lead to those that are spiritual and eternal!

The storm had now continued fourteen days without intermission; the unsteady and tempestuous wind had blown with an uninterrupted severity; the vessel was carried up and down in the Adriatic sea, (that part of the Mediterranean being then known by that name, even as far as the coast of Africa¹,) and the mariners apprehending that they could not be far distant from land, they sounded, and found the water twenty fathoms deep; and were confirmed in their opinion when they sounded a second time, and found the depth of water had decreased to fifteen fathoms. The danger being now imminent, as they might easily be lost among the rocks in so dark and dismal a night, they threw out four anchors from the stern, and, in a state of dreadful anxiety, wished for the return of day.

At this period a plot was discovered among the seamen, which would have consigned the remaining part of the ship's crew to inevitable destruction. They were letting down the boat into the sea, under the pretence of casting anchors out of the fore-ship, but with the real intention of extricating themselves from so perilous a situation. Had this been the only chance of escaping with life, and the

¹ Biscoe, p. 381.

loss of their companions without an alternative, some apology might be made for their conduct. But as the lives of the others entirely depended upon their skill and personal exertions, they were acting contrary not only to humanity, but to the dictates of natural justice. A true sense of the religion of Christ places these duties on the surest foundation. The ready and manly courage with which seamen offer their services to rescue their fellow-creatures from the perils of the ocean, how gallantly they combat the billow, and how skilfully they extricate a sinking brother from the dangers of the deep, calls forth the sincerest accents of warm commendation ; and I repeat it here, as many who “ go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters¹,” may be among my hearers, and may be encouraged to afford that timely succour, which, when they want themselves, I trust, they will receive.

When Paul discovered the attempt of the seamen, he said to the Centurion, “ Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved :” unless we have the assistance of these men, who are now preparing to leave us, our lives cannot be preserved. This does not at all contradict the observation which the Apostle made before, that there should be *no loss* ; as he implied, that God would *bless the exertions* which should be made. These were the conditions of safety. We have every reason, on all occasions, to rely upon the divine promise ; but we

¹ Psalm cvii. 23.

must at the same time remember, that God requires us to do, in all ordinary cases, whatever the abilities He hath given us will permit. When we neglect these means of assisting ourselves, we tempt God; we have no true faith; and therefore cannot expect the Almighty to fulfil what, on temporal occasions, He never *unconditionally* promises.

The Centurion, it is likely, began now to perceive that the prisoner, whose character he had all along respected, was a person of higher estimation than he had imagined, and that he was possessed of a peculiar superiority of knowledge. He never hesitates now to obey the direction of Paul. At *his* command the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, as they were letting her drop into the sea, and she floated away.

While they were waiting for the wished return of day-light, the Apostle took the opportunity of recommending to the whole crew to refresh themselves with food; which they had taken very sparingly during the continuance of the storm. He advises this measure for the sake both of their health and strength; assuring them, under the same conditions, of their personal security. “When he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave God thanks in the presence of them all.”—How graceful, how pious, is this conduct of St. Paul! how expressive of true fortitude, as well as of true devotion! Secret piety, like secret alms, is ever amiable and acceptable. But there are times, when *both* should shine forth as the sun. The light of good deeds, though it ought not to be ostentatiously dis-

played, should not be suppressed, when circumstances render it necessary to be known. The whole ship's company were witnesses of the piety of Paul: the good effects therefore might be proportionably extensive, and his example might be visible, when he himself should be no longer present. They saw his heart in his actions; and, Heathens as they were, I doubt not but they would, for the future, think reverently of the God of Paul; and some of them, perhaps, might be led to the true worship of *Him*, whom they were thus taught to respect.

Let me remark, that this reflection is applicable to the pious practice of blessing, and returning thanks to God for our daily meals. When this is considered, not as a mere customary form, but as a sincere expression of reverence and devotion; however momentary, it tends to excite the warmth of gratitude in the breast which offers it, and to impress sentiments, *bordering at least on devotion*, in those whose thoughtless conduct may induce them to omit this salutary duty.

When the good Apostle, by his own example, had recommended food to his suffering companions, their spirits were recruited, and their confidence restored—"then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat." It is likely that this scene had made a strong impression on the mind of Luke, for it is here that he enumerates the ship's company:—"we were in all," he says, "in the ship 176 persons." So large a number standing around him, in such circumstances of distress; now

in full health and vigour, and yet resting on the very border of eternity, might well draw tears of pious apprehension from so compassionate a spectator. Who that beholds a multitude assembled together on *any* occasion, but may be sensible of similar emotions? And who, that considers himself as one of that multitude, but must feel the uncertainty of life, and the necessity of providing for the future?

“And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.” This was the *third* sacrifice which they made. Things less necessary were first thrown overboard; at last, the staff of life itself. And why, my Brethren, was this sacrifice made? For the sake of preserving those, whom, in all cases, a few years, in this, a few hours might terminate. Life is sweet; and, as it is said in Job, “Yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life¹.” What then ought we not to sacrifice for that which is far beyond the value of the longest life; for that, in comparison of which all transitory enjoyments are as nothing—our precious and immortal souls? “What shall it profit a man,” we have been often asked—Oh! let it not be asked in vain—“What shall it profit, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul²?” This is indeed a serious and important question, which we should endeavour to answer while we are on this side eternity;

¹ Job ii. 4.

² Mark viii. 36.

for there is no knowledge nor wisdom in the grave. Let us take our comparison from these mariners. To save their vessel and themselves, they threw out first the merchants' goods ; then the tackling ; and after that, their only natural support, the bread which was to sustain their lives. Are we desirous of preserving our vessel, and ourselves, from perishing eternally ? Let us cast overboard every thing which hangs as a heavy weight upon our souls, and draws us too closely to this material world. Let us look inward, and we shall soon see what we ought to sacrifice : lusts, passions, incitements of all kinds, sins of omission and commission, darling pleasures, and seducing temptations. These must all be parted with. But there are other indulgences, less inveterate perhaps, but frequently seductive. Must these go too ? Yes ; when they incumber the great business of the soul. We are to " use this world as not abusing it'." This is to be our rule of duty. Without a due regard to this precept, even necessary business will be a snare, and ordinary recreation a dangerous state. In the case of this shipwreck, the mariners rested on the faith of Paul. In that shipwreck which Christians suffer, let us rest upon the faith of Christ. Then when we have, on this holy principle, sacrificed all ; when we have thrown overboard every thing that would have added weight to our condemnation ; when we are resting, as it were, only on a slender plank, and are even hard

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

at death's door, He, who, in his infinite compassion, sends forth the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to console us under all our calamities, will restore to us a better cargo ; He will give us *bread that nourisheth unto eternal life.*

The poor mariners were now not far from safety. The morning light presented before them a creek in the shore of an unknown country. . This was to be their place of refuge. They therefore immediately drew up the anchors, loosed the rudder bands, and hoisting up the main sail to the wind, ran the ship aground. In this situation she became presently a wreck. The hinder part, which buffeted the waves, was soon destroyed : but the former part remained fixed in the shore. Tremendous as their condition was, it did not prevent the hardened soldiers from recommending the destruction of the prisoners, however innocent some of them might be ; but Julius, with his usual attention to the life of Paul, would not listen to their advice, but gave a general order, that all “ who could swim should cast themselves first into the sea,” and assist those who could not ; “ and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship.”—“ And so it came to pass,” adds the Historian, “ that they escaped *all* safe to land.”

This narrative, always interesting to the mariner, is not less so to us who stand upon the shore, and behold the rolling of the wave, the bursting of the billow, the escape, or destruction, of our fellow creatures. We are men, and feel as men. But we are *Christians*, which adds a higher dignity to our

nature, and teaches us how to improve every varied scene of human life. Under this impression we must be assured, that the greatest calamity that can happen to us is, *the shipwreck of our conscience* ; but the guidance and protection of that kind Redeemer, that heavenly pilot, who once walked upon the sea to preserve his sinking Disciple, will save us from the horrors of the storm, if, like St. Peter, we stretch out our arms towards him.

When we thus look up to Christ for health and salvation, truly sensible of our own danger, and firmly relying on His power and merits to work that salvation for us, then may we hear the winds beat and the waters roar, without sinking into that gulph, from whence, by our own efforts, we could never rise again.—“ Almighty and everlasting God, who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family [Paul and his companions] from perishing by water, mercifully look upon us ; that we, being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally, we may come to the land of everlasting life ; there to reign with Thee, world without end, through Jesus Christ our Lord ¹.

¹ Office of Baptism.

LECTURE XXVII.

ACTS XXVIII. 1—15.

Transactions on the Island of Melita.—Voyage, and Journey to Rome.—Melita.—Sicily.—Syracuse.—Rhegium.—Appii Forum.—Three Taverns.—Rome.—A.D. 62.

No change in the order of nature is more grateful to the human mind, because none more conducive to general happiness, than that which arises from the improvement and cultivation of the face of the earth. A great moral writer has observed, that he who makes one spire of grass to grow, where none had grown before, ought to be esteemed a public benefactor of his country. If this remark be just in the study of natural history, with what comfort and delight shall we apply the observation to the cultivation and improvement of spiritual husbandry; with what veneration shall we regard him, who plants the knowledge of Christ where his very name was unknown before, who directs refreshing streams of living water into the parched and barren land of ignorance and vice; bringing forth, in the most unkindly soil, the precious fruits of everlasting life!

How justly may this eulogy be applied to those who have jeopardied their lives for Christ, who have traversed the boisterous ocean, and been cast upon the desolate shore ! How truly do we attribute it to Paul, in the interesting situation in which we now view him, landing from the wreck on the rocks of Melita !

In the various scenes of personal distress, in which we have seen the Apostle involved, is there any where we find him in a more comfortless, or forlorn condition ? The prospect of immediate dissolution I do not consider one of these cases ; for to him, *to die* was always *gain*. But to find himself a shipwrecked prisoner, without food, perhaps without covering, on an unknown and barbarous coast, was to experience an extremity of suffering. But nothing could happen to him without a valuable motive. Though Rome was the destined *end* of his voyage, the intermediate passage was to be blessed with incidents propitious to the propagation of the Christian faith. “ Howbeit,” said the holy vision, “ ye must be cast upon a certain island.” This intimation, doubtless, prepared the Apostle’s mind for great events ; and he would no sooner behold the rugged rock, dashed, as it was, by a heavy and tempestuous sea, than he would reflect with true compassion, on the deplorable mental blindness of the more rude and uncultivated natives of the country. And thus it was. The discharge of his great duties was the first object of his soul. He would feel his heart warm with evangelic love ; it would beat with rapture at the prospect of his yet unconverted friends ;

he would recall to his mind the high promises of the Prophets; he would exclaim in the language of Isaiah: "The wilderness and solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert¹."

The last Lecture offered to our view a variety of suffering. The present opens with the happy prospect of the escape of the shipwrecked mariners; some, by the assistance of their bodily strength; others, floating on boards, and broken pieces of the ship; *all* under the protection of a kind and superintending providence.—"And so it came to pass that," according to the intimation of the Apostle, "they escaped all safe to land."

"And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita."—When we look upon the world in a moral light, how forcibly are we struck with the common allusion of human life resembling the perils and dangers of a sea-voyage. *Multitudes*, in Scripture language, are likened unto *waters*². The sweet and plaintive David, in many instances, adopts the same similitude—"All thy waves and storms are gone over me³." We are all of us indeed sensible of the great hazard which our souls experience, both from their external, and internal, enemies. Temporal evil will hardly be brought into the comparison, because the mind, fortified by

¹ Isaiah xxxv. 1. 6.² Rev. xvii. 15.³ Psalm xlii. 9.

heavenly comfort, will stem the violence of *that* current. But when we suffer from “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life¹ ;” when tumultuous passions agitate the breast, then are we in danger of foundering on a stormy sea; and happy will be that hour, when we shall find ourselves supported by that blessed Spirit, which first breathed into our nostrils the breath of natural life, and now more powerfully lifts us above the waves, by the influence of divine grace; bringing us into a harbour, more to be desired than that of Melita itself, even that heavenly harbour, where all is “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost².”

The island, which received these disconsolate seamen, is celebrated in modern, as it was in ancient, times. It is now called Malta, and is situated to the south of Sicily. A description of the island would add nothing to our Christianity; but the memorable event of this shipwreck has been handed down by tradition on the island; and the rocks, where it is said to have happened, form the entrance of, what is now called, *the Port of St. Paul*. A recent traveller remarks, that the “inhabitants of *Casal Nasciar* boast of being the first Maltese who were baptized; and derive the word *Nasciar* from *Nassara*, which signifies *Christian*³: *casal*, denoting a hamlet, or village. This island, in ancient

¹ 1 John ii. 16.

² Rom. xiv. 17.

³ Epitome of the History of Malta, by Charles Wilkinson. 1805.

times, had been settled by the Phoenicians, and Carthaginians, then the most celebrated traders of the world; and it is probable that their descendants, at this period, formed the majority of the people, though the dominion of it had been, for some time, in the possession of the Romans ¹."

It is necessary to note these circumstances, to account for the appellation which the Historian applies to these Islanders, in condescension to the language of Greece; which uncourteously, and, in this instance, I may add, unjustly, termed every country not Grecian, barbarian. Let us carefully guard against all national distinctions, when those distinctions involve severe reflections, either upon moral, or political character. In many cases, we are sure of being mistaken; in others, it is not our business to condemn.

We shall soon find the inhabitants of Melita liable to the same charge of hasty censure: but at present, we have to applaud that natural humanity, which led them to receive, with a more than ordinary degree of kindness and attention, the destitute, and forlorn persons now cast upon their coast. The violence of the wind, it appears, had been succeeded by torrents of rain; and the severity of both increased by the season of the year. "The barbarous people," says Luke, "shewed us no little kindness," no small expression of their philanthropy; for "they kindled a fire, and received us, *every one*" without exception, entertained us with

¹ Biscoe, p. 67.

the best which circumstances could afford, “because of the present rain, and because of the cold.”

The providence of God, no doubt, prepared this kind reception for those whom he had ordained to spread the knowledge of his will. The manner of their introduction to the island, could give the inhabitants no reason to expect any adequate, or indeed *any*, compensation for their kindness, much less could they imagine that a ship, whose first object was trade, and which contained prisoners, of, at least, doubtful characters, should present them with a treasure, which would enrich them far beyond the utmost imagination of their hearts.

We are not to look upon the natives of Melita as men of rude manners, and uncivilized dispositions. We have beheld the contrary; but I repeat this amiable trait of character in those who had not heard of the name of Christ, that I may warmly recommend an imitation of their kind and hospitable conduct, to those who reside upon a *Christian coast*. Where Christ has been first received, a ship-wrecked mariner will meet with Christian comfort. But where the mind is left savage and uncultivated, where nature is less friendly than on the rocks of Melita, where Christ has *never* come, there we have every thing to dread.—But do not, my Brethren, who live within the prospect of a rocky shore, do not be more merciless than the waves.—What the sea preserves, do not you destroy; improve the situation where Providence hath placed you, by exerting all the duties peculiar to it; plunge into the wave, and draw the

fainting and almost exhausted sufferer, to the best shelter you can give him, to a heart warm with the best fires of Christian love.

I cannot conclude these reflections without congratulating this country, and particularly *this neighbourhood*¹, on the invaluable discovery of the life-boat : a discovery which extends the benevolence, as it extends the security, of those who so well deserve the blessing of him that is ready to perish. We have witnessed its utility, and there may be some of this audience who owe their personal safety to its invention. How much goodness and piety, how much zeal and industry may have been saved to this nation by it, God only knows; whose merciful kindness to us, whether spiritual or temporal, never has an end : and though the Wise Man says, that *there is nothing new under the Sun*, it may be presumed that he restrains the expression to things of a religious and moral nature ; for the application of arts and sciences constantly keeps pace with the improvements of knowledge.

When the Melitans distributed their hospitable refreshments to the ship's company, they made no distinctions in the objects of their kindness—"they received us *all*," says the Historian. To be a *man*, and *in distress*, was a sufficient claim on their hu-

¹ Mr. Greathead, the inventor of the life-boat, resided at South-Shields, in the county of Durham : the several harbours of which county are happily provided with boats of this description :—and since the insertion of the former part of this note, and the experience of many years, innumerable precious lives have, through the blessing of God, been preserved by it from destruction.

manity. But there was one among them whom God had distinguished by peculiar gifts and graces ; and who was to be drawn into notice by means of those very graces and gifts, which were to support his authority. Paul was diligently employing himself, with the rest of his companions in trouble, in collecting materials for the fire ; and “ when he had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, a viper,” or poisonous serpent, roused and irritated by the heat, darted out, and “ fastened on his hand.” The natives of the island observing the circumstance, and knowing the fatal nature of the attack, immediately attributed it to the vengeance of Heaven. They were prepossessed, probably, with an opinion, not favourable to the Apostle. He was brought there in the company of prisoners ; he was himself a prisoner, to whose situation some degree of suspicion will naturally be attached ; and therefore persons more enlightened than the inhabitants of Melita, might have been deceived by an hasty judgment. “ No doubt,” say they, “ this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the perils of the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” The observation was founded on experience ; and every man’s memory will suggest to him some remarkable discovery of murder. Time, country, solitude—*nothing* will skreen the murderer. The man frequently becomes his own informer, as well as tormentor : and when public justice is not immediately satisfied, the horror of so dreadful a fact fastened on the conscience, renders him a fugitive, and a vagabond upon earth ; and, in the spirit of

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the first murderer, he cries out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear¹." But in this case, the judgment of the Melitans was erroneous. There was nothing in the behaviour of Paul to justify the suspicion. It is true he was a prisoner ; but it is the liberal interpretation of the law, at least of the law of England, to consider every man innocent till the disclosure of fact, or the verdict of his countrymen, pronounces him guilty. This humane maxim of law should be considered as a rule of moral and religious conduct, as well as of private opinion. "Who art thou that judgest another?" is a question every man should ask himself, when he is tempted to offer any hasty judgment. An unreasonable prejudice, a prejudice founded on no better foundation than that of those who said of Paul, "No doubt this man is a murderer," has destroyed the peace, and overturned the fortunes of thousands. We may disclaim perhaps all intention of injury ; we may say, It is *but* our opinion. But who can stop the fire that is kindled by a spark, or compute the extensive ravages of flames ?

This hasty observation had no sooner been made on the Apostle, than He *whose Paul was*, and *whom Paul served*, chose to attest the dignity of his messenger by a decided and unquestionable miracle. The Melitans knew the poisonous quality of the animal, which had fastened on Paul's hand. There could, therefore, be no deception. Paul took new, under whose immediate agency he stood. Un-

¹ Gen. iv. 12.

· moved by the incident, he calmly “ shook off the viper into the fire, and felt no harm.” This circumstance, which at first excited their admiration, proved, no doubt, the foundation afterwards of a full conviction of faith. It was in fact the accomplishment of our Saviour’s promise to his Disciples—“ These signs shall follow them that believe, they shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ¹.”

During this interval the spectators were looking for the speedy operation of the poison ; but finding, contrary to their expectation and experience, that Paul continued perfectly safe and well, they suddenly changed their opinions, and said that “ he was a *god*.” That idolatry, which had left them some traces of a superintending Providence, still kept their eyes blinded as to the nature of the Holy Being, who made, and who preserves, the Universe. But the time was approaching when, some of them at least, should be induced to consider Him as *a God that is at hand, and not afar off*. Sudden change of sentiment is generally the symptom of a rapid and impetuous mind. But in this case it was the result of observation. They could not but perceive that the transaction was of no ordinary cast, and they attributed it to such an interposition, as came within the compass of the judgment.

· If we have found occasion to condemn the Melitans for indulging an unreasonable prejudice, let us give them due praise for acknowledging their error, when

¹ Mark xiv. 18.

they had discovered it. The greater danger is from the contrary conduct. An ingenuous confession of faults, is the parent of a steady reformation. From various causes the judgment of man may be perverted; by various temptations he may be led to the commission of sin. But when the mind is convinced, when he feels his true situation, then comes the real trial of his strength. For confession is only one step towards repentance; and this is the point of time, when the natural and spiritual man are at variance. The natural man pleads for indulgence; the spiritual man does not trust one thought with his forsaken errors:—"Escape for thy life," says he, "look not behind thee." The former returns to his forbidden pleasures, for want of that grace which the latter thankfully accepts, and without which no man can gain the conquest. As therefore we are taught from the former part of the behaviour of these Melitans, to avoid violent and unjust prepossessions; so by the latter are we instructed never to remain obstinate in error, but to be gentle, and *easy to be intreated* into the paths of holiness and truth. An impenetrable disposition stands at the greatest distance from the amiable graces of the Gospel; whilst a sincere conviction of sin, accompanied by an *humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart*, is the genuine mark of a truly Christian spirit.

Near that place where the ship was wrecked, Publius, the chief Governor of the Island under the Romans, resided. Providence had brought them to a happy neighbourhood, and had disposed his heart to be as friendly to their distresses, as the

hearts of the native inhabitants. He received them with the utmost tenderness and compassion, and lodged them three days *courteously*; that is, not merely with the exact measure of humanity which might be adequate to their wants, but with that attention, not easy to be expressed, which makes benefits doubly grateful.

Every incident in this narrative is instructive, and strongly calculated to impress upon our minds that duty of which the whole Gospel is full, the great duty of philanthropy. “Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away¹;” but that pure and holy sentiment of charity, which even Heathens have felt, and which, Christians are even worse than Heathens, if they do not cultivate and improve, shall remain for ever; and in the company of Faith and Hope, shall enter the everlasting doors of Heaven itself.

St. Paul’s short residence with Publius produced a still further display of his apostolic gifts; so easily does divine Providence connect together a train of events, which have no apparent, or necessary, dependence upon each other. How much the truth of Christianity rests upon miracles, appears not only from those performed by our Lord himself in his own person, but from the introduction of them by his Apostles, on all suitable occasions! St. Paul, as he travelled through new countries, constantly ap-

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

plied this visible argument to his preaching ; sometimes, as we find him here, attracting notice by a supernatural exertion of his power, and then introducing his doctrines ; sometimes attesting the truth of his heavenly doctrines, by the miracles which followed.

“ It came to pass that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux.”—The ordinary infirmities of human nature are made conducive to the divine glory. What an accession of spiritual benefit should we receive, if we were thoroughly sensible of this truth ! “ Though the Lord cause grief (by bringing upon us an extremity of sickness) yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies ; for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men ¹.” So many fruits of faith are to be displayed in a state of bodily disorder, that a sound Christian may well glory in his infirmities. How did St. Paul conduct himself under a severe infliction, which he calls a *thorn in the flesh* ? He applied himself to the restorer of the miserable. “ For this thing,” said he, “ I sought the Lord *thrice*, that it might depart from me.” Earnest prayer, and devout supplication, is our first refuge. Whatever the event may be, this salutary address can never be without effect. It will prepare the heart, either for the restoration of our health, which will be a new trial of sincerity, or it will produce in us an easy acquiescence, and a peaceful resignation, under all our sufferings. “ And

¹ Lam. iii. 33, 34.

he said unto me," continues the Apostle, "*My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* Most gladly, therefore," he adds, " will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me ¹."

The father of Publius had not this support; neither could his Roman philosophy supply it. It were well, too, if Christians boasted less of this stoicism of character, and relied more upon the strength of faith. The bed of sickness ought to bring us acquainted with ourselves; and the more intimate we grow with the inward man, the outward will become less an object of our care and attention. We shall then be content to live, and not afraid to die; because life and death will be weighed in an even balance, and each will be estimated according to its respective value.

When St. Paul was informed of the deplorable condition of the father of his hospitable host, he found himself actuated by *the gift of healing*; and was sensible that *He*, in whose name all his miracles were wrought, intended to promote the cause of his religion, by the sudden restoration to health of so eminent a person. "He went in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him." Paul did not, as on some occasions, restore the sick person by a word; but he observed, as it were, a gradation in his manner of cure. He went in—he prayed—he laid his hands on him. The subject of this miracle was an heathen. The object of the

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

Apostle, we may be assured, was his conversion. He wished to make him sensible of the efficacy of prayer; he, doubtless, named the name of *Jesus*; he would address him as his Saviour; his spiritual, as well as his bodily, deliverer; he would make it appear, that he himself was only an instrument in the hands of the living and true God; and that the fabulous gods of the father of Publius, were no more than deified men, or imaginary beings. He would introduce in his holy conversation, the true revelation of the Gospel, that *good news* which Malta had not then heard: all this he would impress, in his own energetic language, on the wondering, but expecting patient: he would then lift up his hand over him, after his blessed Master's example and injunction; and he would receive, with grateful rapture, the great blessing of renovated health, and, doubtless, of Christian salvation.

Valuable as we estimate the health of the body, still more, indeed *most* valuable, is the welfare of the soul. I dwell the longer on this subject, because bodily infirmity is a necessary condition from which none of us are exempt. And I would press upon you, with all the strength of exhortation, the use to which a state of sickness should always be applied. We, my brethren, who are often called upon, by profession, to attend the pillow of the sick and dying, well know how unprepared too many are, for that awful and important hour. We know that the best counsel we can give, is half, if not wholly, dissipated, by being directed to a languid and decaying body, animated too frequently

by an uninformed, and often, alas ! an unconverted soul.—*And this in a land of Christians !* Sometimes, blessed be God ! a different scene is presented to us : and a happy sight it is to see the righteous expire. “ Is any sick among you ? Let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over them ; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick ; and the Lord shall raise him up ¹ ;” if not to health and strength in this world, to a glorious resurrection in the world to come.

The performance of this miracle led the way to many others of a similar nature : and many of the inhabitants, I doubt not, with the father of Publius at their head, began to hail the rising of the sun of righteousness. The modest narrator of this history, who never mentions his own name, or records his own deserts, we may reasonably suppose, assisted his venerable friend both in preaching the glad tidings of salvation, and in confirming the word of faith by surprising miracles, during the three months which they abode upon the island. “ They honoured *us*,” he says, “ with many *honours* ; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.” We rejoice to record the testimonies of their grateful affection. The expression, *many honours*, perhaps refers rather to the spiritual, than to the temporal benefits they had experienced ; the word *honour* implying something more than would enter into the consideration of a remuneration of temporal wants, or even for healing their diseases, without the belief of a supernatural interposition. We may imagine this to be

¹ James v. 14, 15.

the case, as the latter part of the observation expressly mentions the relief of their ordinary necessities : “ at our departure they laded the vessel with such things as were necessary” for the prosecution of the voyage.

The valuable benefits which the blessed shipwreck cast upon this almost barren rock, have survived, I trust, in the breasts of many, even to this very day. A religious order of the Popish Church¹, which took its rise in a romantic age, after two or three removals, had been fixed upon the island between two and three hundred years ; till, by the fortune of war, the island has fallen under the government of this country, and the order has been removed from it. That it may be as much benefitted by our religion, as it has been by our arms, is the sincere prayer of the Reformed Christian !

A ship belonging to Alexandria, which had passed the winter at Melita, was engaged to take in the party which had been shipwrecked, and conveyed them to their intended port. The historian, with that unpremeditated accuracy which marks the truth, mentions the name of the vessel, “ whose sign was Castor and Pollux.” The ship probably carried on its head some image of these *sons of Jupiter*, who were superstitiously supposed to be propitious to seamen. The conclusion of this celebrated voyage, was short and prosperous. They spent three days at Syracuse, probably for the purposes of trade ; and then steering round the

¹ The Knights of Malta.

eastern coast of the island of Sicily, of which Syracuse was the metropolis, they came to Rhegium, a sea-port town on the coast of Calabria in Italy: and after one day, the south wind, as St. Luke says, blowing favourably, we arrived the second day at Puteoli, our destined, and long desired, harbour.

Early as it was in the history of the Gospel, Christianity had even now found a place of residence at Puteoli. How delightful for these early converts to receive in their infant Church the great Apostle of the Gentiles! How consoling to the heart of Paul, to find friends on this distant shore, and to be refreshed by the manifestations of the Spirit, after so perilous a voyage! With the permission of the indulgent Julius, he was allowed to remain a week in this happy society.

The journey from hence was by land. The arrival of so eminent an Apostle of Christ at Puteoli, was soon communicated to the Roman Christians; and many of the Brethren, some of whom were personally known to him, and others, attracted by the knowledge of his character, and particularly by the invaluable Epistle which he had sent to the Roman Church a few years before, came to meet him, and conduct him on the road; some as far as Appii forum; others at Tres Tabernæ; well known stages on the road to Rome; the former fifty-one, the latter thirty-three miles, distant from that famous city.

It appears that the mind of the Apostle suffered some agitation at his approach to this celebrated place. Let the unfeeling endeavour to account for it, if they can. It was not fear; it was not

despair of any kind, which oppressed him. He was called by God. He knew, and valued his commission. Yet the infirmities of the human frame made a momentary impression on him, which was soon dissipated by the kind consolations of his Christian friends—"whom when St. Paul saw, he thanked God, and *took courage*."

Our next, and concluding Lecture, will present us with a view of this great Apostle at his first entrance into the then metropolis of the world. We have seen him at Athens, confounding the wisdom of the wise. We shall behold him at Rome, propagating the sublime doctrines of his Master, even in *Cæsar's household*. But what are these, my Brethren, if we rest contented with the *prospect*? What are to us the conversion of the Maltese, or the propagation of Christ's religion at Rome, if it be not our nightly study, and our daily care, to plant the ever blessed Gospel *in our own hearts*?—"If we see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven," and *we ourselves cast out*?

Let us humble ourselves then before the mighty hand of God, and implore his grace to "assist us mercifully in all our supplications and prayers, and to dispose the way of his servants towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that among all the changes and chances of this mortal life, they may ever be defended by his most gracious and ready help, through Jesus Christ our Lord¹." Amen.

¹ Prayer after the Offertory, in the Book of Common Prayer.

LECTURE XXVIII.

ACTS XXVIII. 16—31.

St. Paul's Entrance into, and Transactions at, Rome.
A. D. 63—65.

THE first entrance of St. Paul into the city of Rome raises, in the contemplative mind, many important and agreeable reflections. We begin to perceive a sensible progress in the doctrines of Christianity. What was planted like a grain of mustard-seed in the small territory of Palestine, spreads into a flourishing tree on the banks of the Tyber. The song of salvation, indeed, had been sung in this celebrated metropolis, before the arrival of the Apostle Paul. Ecclesiastical history acquaints us, that the Gospel had been preached at this place several years before, by St. Peter. At all events, we find a society of Christians established at Rome very early in the history of the Church, to whom St. Paul addressed an invaluable epistle; and of whom he records the pleasing remembrance, that their "obedience," their purity of faith, and subsequent good conduct,

had “come abroad unto all men¹,” was the general subject of admiration and esteem.

When we recollect what Rome was at this period of her history, the seat of art and science, the possessor of all the learning which the whole world could then produce (for the wisdom of the Grecian sages had melted before her) the conqueror of distant provinces, and visited not only by many from her numerous tributary kingdoms, but by the inhabitants of remote regions, attracted by her celebrity and pre-eminent qualities; we cannot but conclude, that this was within the plan of Providence, to diffuse the knowledge of a Saviour farther than the Roman eagle ever found its way. And accordingly we find, that within a few years, the primitive purity of the Church of Rome displayed a large assembly of Christians; Christians who “obtained a good report through faith²,” and bore their cross with joy.

Such was this little Church of Christian converts, when Nero, whose name has now become proverbial for his character, was Emperor of the Romans. But in what language shall I contrast thy state, O Rome! when papal power had corrupted the purest daughter of Heaven, and a proud imperial hierarchy had been erected on the most unspotted, benign, and humble of all foundations? And even now, when this power is shorn of some of her deceitful beams, the blessed cross, the object of every Christian’s love, is prostituted to a vile superstition, an

¹ Rom. xvi. 19.

² Heb. xi. 39.

abominable idolatry, or an execrable policy. Was it for this, that the zealous Peter founded an holy Church? Was it for this, that Paul entered this great city laden with bonds, and propagated the most salutary truths, with the boldness and energy suited to his character? Was it for this, that *both* these Apostles, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, *on this very spot*, shed their dearest blood in confirmation of their doctrines? No. The wise purposes of Heaven are not all developed. The time is approaching with no tardy step, that will reveal to us many great and important changes that will take place, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come; and then we shall see reason to acknowledge, that *the blood of martyrs* has been *the seed of the Church*..

The Apostle entered Rome with his brother-prisoners around him; but this comfort he enjoyed above his blessed Master, when *He* was in the hands of the civil power, that he had friends to soothe his sorrows, and administer to his necessities. His kind conductor Julius, it is likely, interested himself in his favour; for when the other prisoners were delivered, as usual, to the captain of the Prætorian guard, Paul was permitted to enjoy a more easy restraint, and to dwell in apartments of his own; guarded indeed by a soldier, to whom, according to the Roman custom, he was chained.

It does not appear from this narrative, *when* Paul was called to his trial before Cæsar; certainly not soon after his arrival, for we find him

employed in his mission, from the first moment of his entrance into Rome. Within three days, he desired a conference with the principal Jews who were then resident at Rome, to explain to them *who* and *what* he was, to inform them why he was a prisoner in bonds, and, above all, to take that early opportunity of offering to them those glad tidings of great joy, which it was his highest happiness, as well as his indispensable duty, to communicate.

The Apostle acted here, as he had before done on similar occasions; he made his first offers in every place to the native, or conforming Jews. With that courtesy which always marks his character, he acquaints them with all the circumstances which had led him into his present situation, and asserts his own innocence, without bringing any accusation against his countrymen. To mere flesh and blood, such forbearance is always difficult. Irritating thoughts often produce irritating expressions, and these are the parents of bitter animosities. But the mind that is subdued under the yoke of Christ, that is truly humbled with a sense of its own unworthiness, will bend before the inflicted blow, and will be ready to say with St. Paul, even after a tumultuous trial at Jerusalem, a long imprisonment at Cæsarea, a stormy voyage, and a dangerous shipwreck—"Not that I have ought to accuse my nation of."

But spirited is his language, when he discovers to them the true cause of his personal sufferings. They were not aware of the message which he bore, and that beneath the appearance of an af-

flicted prisoner, they would find a strenuous, and inspired prophet, and apostle of God. “For this cause, said he, have I sent for you, to see you, and to speak with you, because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” *The hope of Israel!* How sweet should the expression sound in the ear of those who were waiting for Messiah’s coming! How often did the pious Israelite look forward to this happy time! While he read the prophecy of Isaiah, his heart would leap within him; like old Simeon in the temple, he would look anxiously for this *consolation*, and anticipate the long-expected Messiah! This cause of his present imprisonment, the Apostle asserted before the Sanhedrim; “for the hope of the resurrection of the dead (that is, *the dead in Christ*) I am called in question.” Before Felix, he bore testimony to the same “hope of a resurrection” through Christ. He pleaded the same “hope,” resting in the same divine promises, before Agrippa; and before the chief of the Jews at Rome, he makes the same firm declaration—“for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”

Prejudiced as these Jews were against the Christian sect, or heresy, as they termed it, certainly considering the word in its most obnoxious sense; yet were they not unwilling to hear what Paul could say in his defence. His personal affability had recommended him to their attention, at their first interview with him. They neither heard nor saw, as they acknowledged, any thing amiss in his character and conduct; and though they under-

stood that his religious opinions differed from their own, they appointed a day to meet him at his own lodgings, to hear the important subject thoroughly discussed.

At this meeting, we behold the Apostle once more in the office of a preacher, and perceive, from the nature of his arguments, that they were, as usual, the best which could be selected for the conversion of a Jew. His earnest manner in addressing his audience, and his persevering repetition of what might arrest their attention, and convince their hearts, corresponded with his weighty subject. He expounded the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the foundation of Jewish, as well as Christian faith; he extracted passages, copious and impressive, both from the law of Moses, and the prophets, which could bear no just interpretation, unless they were applied to the object of his mission. He told them, that in the person of Jesus they were to look for the true Messiah, that great and glorious deliverer of the human race from the tyranny of sin and Satan; that the kingdom of God was thus about to be established upon earth; that the time was arrived when old things were done away, and all things had become new. These were indeed happy tidings to those, who themselves confessed, that neither they, nor their forefathers, were able to bear the severe pressure of the ceremonial law; above all, they were joyful tidings to those who expected redemption in Israel, and looked forward to a better, that is, an heavenly, country.

How earnestly did Paul labour to establish this great, this everlasting truth! From morning till evening, this conference continued; and even then, so hard is prejudice, so impenetrable is wilful ignorance, the conviction was not universal; for “some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.” The same arguments made not the same impression, though enforced by the same authority, and uttered by the same eloquence, and truth. The reason is, they fell not on the same soil. Some resisted the influence of that blessed Spirit, which others thankfully received. This observation is of considerable importance. Resistance to spiritual improvement is confessedly a crime of no small magnitude, as our minds are then not open to conviction. When they are, the Holy Spirit of God will lead us unto all truth. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God¹.” If it were not for this repugnance, this blindness of heart, no adequate reason could be given, why the wisest and best of the heathen, who must have been acquainted with the sacred writings, who must have personally known some of the primitive converts and apostles, and of course might have had an opportunity of examining all the evidences of Christianity, did not profess the pure doctrines which they heard. What must we say of Seneca, who, at this very period, probably, resided in Rome? What must we say of Trajan, and of Marcus Antoninus, men amiable and learned; and

¹ Rom. x. 17.

yet whose fair fame is blighted, not only by a disbelief of the principles of the Gospel, but by severe persecutions of its inoffensive professors? The truth is, the philosophy of this world had obscured their reason, and perverted their understanding; for it is unlikely that those who enjoined divine honours to be paid to their own statues, (which indeed was made a test of the principles of the early Christians) should attend to a religion which preached a crucified Saviour; and required, as an expression of a sound faith, a true, pure, and unqualified humility of mind.

The same cause indeed prevented the wise of ancient times from embracing the Gospel, which still occasions many of those who now call themselves *wise*, to reject it, namely, ignorance of its value. Learned, and almost contemporary historians among the Romans, appear totally ignorant of the persons they describe, when they mention the followers of Jesus. They are not able to distinguish a Christian, from a Jew; and one of them mistakes the very name of Christ. Would to God that many modern unbelievers did not fall under the same censure: for when we read of *Christians* in the pages of many recent historians, we have a difficulty in apprehending a likeness. And happy would it be for the world, if the history of modern Christianity presented to them such models as they could *not* mistake. But from one unhappy cause or other, infidelity finds, or forges, some apology for itself: and alas! we may still adopt St. Luke's observation on this conference of St. Paul with the

Jews at Rome :—“ some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”

In this divided mind, the Jews were departing from the presence of the Apostle, when he called their attention to one emphatic declaration of the prophet Isaiah ; a prophet, whom they revered, and whose words every one of them acknowledged to be the words of sacred inspiration. As if he had said, “ One word more before we part; and reflect upon it, as the last offer of salvation. Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah—unto your fathers, and through them, He now speaks to you ; for you are now, from inveterate prejudice, as indisposed to attend to his words, as your fathers were before you ; *that hearing, you shall hear, and not understand; and seeing, you shall see, and not perceive ; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they wilfully closed ;* the consequence of which is, that they will neither *hear, nor understand*, the awful truths which are preached to them, to make them capable of receiving the divine mercy. Beware then of the fatal sin of wilful blindness, which was the case with your fathers, and God grant ! it may not be with you ; that *your* hearts may be accessible to truth, and *your* eyes may behold the light of life ! *Be it known therefore unto you* (I pronounce it as a solemn and last declaration) *that the salvation of God*, that glorious state of redemption through faith in the Messiah, which Isaiah and the Prophets foretold, and whose actual coming and resurrection I have laid before you with the most incontrovertible evi-

dence ; that salvation, I add, which you reject, *is now sent unto Gentiles* ; unto Heathens ; not only to those resident in this great city, but unto those that inhabit remote, and now unknown, regions of the earth : and it will be some aggravation of your future remorse, if you continue unconvinced, when I inform you *that they will hear*, and will gladly accept it."

This emphatic warning of the evangelical Prophet is more frequently repeated than any other quotation from the Old Testament¹. Our Lord Himself uses it. A proof that no warning was more necessary *then* ;—and, let me ask, is any more necessary *now* ? That *our hearts are waxed gross*, that *our ears are dull of hearing*, and that we have *closed our eyes* against the pure ray of Gospel-light, however general the observation, is too true a picture of the present state of Christianity. With all the advantages of an illuminated age, with all the aids of brilliant learning, and still more brilliant talents, we have daily occasion to deplore, that *hearing, we hear, and will not understand ; and seeing, we see, and do not perceive*. When, oh ! when shall arise that glorious morning of the Gospel, that shall dart the bright beams of salvation into every heart ! When shall that happy hour arrive, that will bring the lustre of the Saviour on its wing, and "*all flesh shall see it together*"². When shall all hearts feel the influence of that sanctifying grace, which will

¹ Isa. vi. 9. Matt. xiii. 14. Mark iv. 12. Luke viii. 10.
John xii. 40. Rom. xi. 8.

² Isa. xl. 5.

subdue in us all inordinate affections, all longings after worldly things, and will transfuse into our souls that one great and glorious principle, that only affection productive of true heavenly consolation, *the love of Christ which passeth knowledge* ¹.

After hearing the decisive and authoritative language of Paul, who knew how to assume the venerable dignity of an Apostle when he was not attended to as a friend, we are not surprised that the Jews, after their departure, had *great reasonings among themselves*. Happy those who reason to conviction! As there is no state of mind more uneasy than a state of doubt, it becomes an act of necessity to investigate the truth, and an act of humanity to declare it. The discovery of religious truth, must therefore produce happiness in proportion to its value; and he who can estimate the value of eternal redemption, next to the actual possession of it, is master of all that the happiest of mortals can expect, or God Himself bestow.

In diffusing these tidings of salvation as far as his restrained situation would permit, the good Apostle employed himself in the two whole succeeding years. During the period that Luke continued his narrative, no public trial, or removal, or change of situation, appears to have happened to him. Though other records, possibly authentic records, continue and conclude the history of St. Paul's life, yet as his friend and fellow-traveller stops here, I presume not to go beyond the word of inspiration.

But we have still before us the happy method

¹ Eph. iii. 19.

in which these two years were spent. Though the Apostle might have visited various countries in this interval, and have left more than traces of himself wherever he travelled, a large field, and an abundant harvest, were open to him at Rome. That city, by its own population, and the influx of strangers, was, in moral calculation, equal to many countries. The indulgence he experienced from the government, made his situation comparatively easy; he was permitted to reside in his “own hired house, and to receive all that came in unto him:” and we may imagine, from the rapid progress of Christian faith, how many would flock to him for instruction. His doctrines were the doctrines of life; and though Luke, as we may have observed, had frequently repeated the substance of the Apostle’s preaching in the several places to which he had accompanied him, before he closes his eloquent and simple narrative, he once more recounts the sum of that holy faith which he continued to inculcate in the metropolis of the Roman world—“preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence,” with all freedom of speech: the Providence of God so ordering it, that no Magistrate interposed with his authority to prevent him, nor did any accident interrupt his invaluable labours.

Indefatigable as the Apostle was in *preaching* the Gospel at Rome, during his imprisonment, we have still further light thrown upon his labours by the Canon of Scripture itself. Four of his own

Epistles bear intrinsic evidence, that they were composed during this period; namely, his Epistle to the Ephesians, that to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Philippians. His active mind never lost sight of the great purpose of his mission. The spiritual welfare of his converts dwelt continually in his thoughts.

It has been remarked, that the letters of St. Paul, during his imprisonment, breathe a greater spirit of benevolence, humanity, and tenderness, towards the persons he addresses, (not to say of resignation, and heroic resolution, with regard to himself) than those which he wrote when he was at liberty. The observation certainly has a foundation: and it will not be found *out of nature*, that the heart of the best of men should be softened by personal affliction.

The Epistle to the Ephesians appears to have been the first in order of those written at this time, probably not long after his arrival at Rome; for he mentions no expectation of enlargement, as he does in the subsequent Epistles. “I the prisoner of the Lord beseech you¹”; this was a new and prevailing motive for their obedience. His pathetic intreaty should not pass unnoticed, as it expresses the desire of every pious Minister of the Gospel, that he should be remembered in the prayers of his parishioners:—“Pray, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, for all saints; and *for me*, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery

¹ Eph. iv. 1.

of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador *in bonds* ¹." This is indeed the language of the heart, and could not be counterfeited or misunderstood.

The same expressions occur, with small variations, in the Epistle to the Colossians, written nearly at the same time, and sent by the same messenger. How tenderly must their hearts have sympathized with him in the concluding passage of his letter! "The salutation by the hand of me, Paul. *Remember my bonds.* Grace be with you ²."

The elegant and interesting Epistle to Philemon, written for the purpose of softening the severity of his reproof to a penitent, and returning servant, who had injured him, and left him, and had lately become a convert to St. Paul at Rome, bears a different character from those addressed to particular Churches. It abounds in the important points of Christian faith; but particularly deserves our attention from that exquisite fruit, the spirit of Christian charity. In this, as it were familiar letter, he expresses the hope of a *speedy* enlargement.

Something of the same kind appears in his Epistle to the Church of Philippi, which was written in return for a present which they had sent him; and in this, he intimates the progress which the Gospel had made, even in the palace of the Emperor ³. These are indeed interesting letters, and speak warmly to our feelings, particularly when we recollect the circumstances in which they were composed.

¹ Eph. vi. 18, 19.

² Col. iv. 18.

³ Phil. iv. 22.

Are there any of us who may be removed from the execution of public duties, by some accidental occurrence of life? Are there any, whom loss of health, or loss of liberty, may confine to a narrower sphere of action; or whom, situation of any kind may deprive of a larger range of good offices? Let such reflect, that Paul converted multitudes when chained to a Roman soldier; and that his pen distributed his warm heart to the remotest regions. As every man is charged with some duty, so there is no place or station in which it may not be exerted. "Let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God¹."

The second Epistle to Timothy, which some have attributed to this period of St. Paul's life, appears with greater probability, (though attended with some difficulties) to relate to his *second* visit to Rome, when he had his martyrdom more immediately in view. In this Epistle he expresses *no hope of enlargement*. It is pathetic throughout. He entreats Timothy to come to him, and console him; as well as to receive his last pastoral charges for his flock: "for," he says, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand²."

I drop the veil over the last moments of St. Paul. His friend and historian, for reasons that cannot now be known, has done the same. Nor can we dismiss him more emphatically from the scene, than in his own eloquent language, in that noble declaration, and evangelic assurance, which,

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 24.

² 2 Tim. iv. 6.

I pray God through Christ, that we all may have grace to imitate.—“ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.—Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day ¹.”

The Christian Church, in every age, has commemorated the value of St. Paul's ministry ; and as the latter days approach, time, instead of erasing his venerable and pleasing portrait from the canvass, will mellow the tints, and give, if possible, an additional gracefulness to the picture. His character I shall not attempt to delineate. It is before you in the history of his conversion, of his apostolic labours, of his indefatigable travels ; but, above all, in that holy transcript of his mind, visible in his Epistles. He adorned his ministry, not only by many excellent and admirable gifts of the Spirit, and miracles, which he was enabled to perform in confirmation of the doctrines which he preached, but in those exquisite graces and amiable virtues, which peculiarly distinguished his public, and his private conduct. Among these his *faith* was particularly eminent. He was a diligent and a strenuous guardian of the doctrine revealed to him from Heaven, justification through faith in the merits of *Him who appeared to him in the way*. His whole soul was occupied in inculcating this heavenly, this indispensable doctrine. Neither labours, nor troubles, neither actual perils, nor apprehended dan-

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

gers, diverted him from his purpose. He neither disguised the truth for fear of giving offence, nor suppressed it when necessary to be known. He *shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God*: he warned every one, night and day, even with tears of evangelical love: he *testified both to Jews and Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*. His paternal mind bent with fervent affection over his pious converts, his children in the faith. He dearly loved the Church which he had planted by the grace of God; and was as ready to shed his blood for its welfare, as he had been to wear out his life in its establishment, and support. “I will very gladly spend, and be spent for you¹,” said this good man and affectionate pastor of the Church of Christ: and may his example fire all succeeding pastors to assert the same holy cause, with all freedom tempered with discretion, with all fervency without the excess of enthusiastic rapture, and with zeal according to knowledge!—“We were gentle among you,” says he again; “even as a nurse cherisheth her children, so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted to you not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us².”

Who will wonder, Paul! that the grace of Christ attended such a ministry as thine? But who will cease to wonder, if he be told, that even thy labours, thy preaching, thy written admonitions, and

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 15.

² 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

clear disclosure of *the truth as it is in Jesus*, has failed to convince men, otherwise distinguished for brilliant talents and all the ornaments of human learning, that thy warm expostulations and divine doctrines have not always succeeded in restraining, or subduing, that radical taint of the soul, which leads mankind to every vicious propensity; and that thy tears have made no impression upon those who would not willingly allow themselves to be called *the hard of heart*? But what are thy disappointments, Paul? what are thy mortifications, to those the Son of God experienced, when He came in person to offer salvation to a world of sinners?

Here let us pause—and cease to penetrate into mysteries, which God has not thought proper to reveal. “Secret things belong unto the Lord; but those which are revealed, belong unto us, and our children for ever¹.” Among the things which God hath promised, and which eye hath not yet seen fully accomplished, is the calling of the Gentiles into the Christian Church. Paul was emphatically *the Apostle of the Gentiles*; and through his industry and spiritual graces, many happy souls have been introduced into the fold of the Saviour.

But, my Brethren, while we look around us in the world, and consider that we are part of that vast multitude for whom Christ died, and for whose benefit his chosen Apostle travelled far and near, let us reflect that it is our duty to forward this

¹ Deut. xxix. 29.

gracious plan of Providence, by every exertion in our power. Let us re-echo the sound which has gone forth into all lands, and repeat the blessed word, which probably *now*, at no very remote period, will visit the utmost ends of the world; for “as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations¹.”

With the prospect of this happy change on the surface of the earth, and with fervent prayer that *we* may see the glory of the Lord *together*, I close my ministerial labours in this place. Your renewed attentions, and numerous attendance, claim my warmest thanks. God has been pleased to allow me many opportunities of repeating his word among you. May we mutually remember them in the day of Jesus Christ!—And may “the Almighty God, who called Luke, the physician, (and eloquent historian of the Acts of the Apostles) to be an Evangelist, and physician of the soul, grant that by the wholesome medicines of the doctrines delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed, through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord².” Amen.

¹ Isa. lxi. 11.

² Collect for St. Luke's day.

THE END.

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